"THE FANTASTIC FOUR"

by

Michael France

Based On The Characters By

Stan Lee & Jack Kirby

FIRST DRAFT
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FADE IN:

A VAST, DARK METALLIC ROOM - HIGH ANGLE

The lights are off -- there's just enough in the way of scattered LEDs on computer equipment to give us an idea of the cathedral scale of the room. The sound of FOOTSTEPS on the concrete lets us know that one lone man is walking toward a central console --

-- when the man hits a lightswitch, the entire room blazes into light -- revealing that the man, unrecognizably small in this cavernous room, is standing at a console in the middle of a fifty-foot diameter logo on the concrete --

-- a **blue numeral "4"** against a white background, banded by a blue circle. From this angle we MOVE DOWN --

BEHIND THE CONSOLE

We still can't see the man working the switches -- but as more lights come on, they reveal an unusually designed track and tunnel that lead out to an unknown point. With the hum of machinery, electromagnets that ring the tunnel fire to life one after the other, in a row of lights travelling backwards to --

THE FF-4 PHOENIX SPACECRAFT

A brand new hybrid of a space shuttle and a high altitude jet, sitting and waiting on the track, also bearing the "4" logo seen on the floor. The quickest way to describe its futuristic, yet realistic appearance: Kirbyesque. The man who designed it is --

REED RICHARDS

who is at the console, wearing a blue flight suit bearing the "4" logo. Reed stares at the ship, thrilled, awed -- every day of his thirty-five years has led up to this one. Behind him, a voice --

SUE (O.S.)
Nice ride.

SUSAN STORM

his fiance and partner, both radiant and smart enough to keep up with Reed, is crossing the room behind him, beaming.

SUE
Eleven years in research labs and wind tunnels -- three prototypes that blew up -- and I don't think anyone knows how many billion dollars --
(reaches him)
-- all for a couple of weeks in space.
(beat)
Is it everything you dreamed of?

REED
(eyes locked on ship)
No -- not quite yet --
(takes her hand)
-- <u>now</u> it is.

Sue takes Reed by the chin and turns his face away from the ship and towards her for a kiss -- as we go to --

EXT. OUTSIDE THE OTI COMPLEX - ON A ROOFTOP - THE SUNRISE

breaks over the horizon of the Texas desert -- and a man in a blue flight suit stands at the roof's edge, over a sign with the logo of the "Office For Technical Innovation". He's enjoying the view, and the last two inches of a Churchill length cigar. This is

COMMANDER BEN GRIMM

A large, gruff man in his late thirties who doesn't suffer fools gladly. From the look on his face, we can see he's trying to get every last bit of pleasure out of this cigar. His serene look of contentment is only slightly rattled when --

-- behind him, a young TECHNICIAN moves nervously out from a rooftop doorway. Ben Grimm isn't someone you interrupt casually.

TECHNICIAN
Uh, Commander Grimm -- ? It's almost launch time and --

BEN
(simple, cuts him off)
Not until I say it is.

Unhurried, Ben draws the cigar down to the band, savors the last bit of smoke -- and regretfully stubs it out on the wall.

BEN
Last one for two weeks.
(beat)
Your boss, Richards -- if he's such a genius, how come he can't invent a space station you can smoke in?

TECHNICIAN
(eyes watch)
Uh, Commander --

BEN
Relax, kid. This is my twelfth mission, and I ain't been left behind yet.
(turns for door)
You wanna worry about somebody? Worry about Storm.

As Ben marches toward the door, we CUT TO:

EXT. **JOHNNY STORM IN MOTION** - EXTREME CLOSEUP

All we can see is Johnny's face, eyes shut, as he's kissing a woman we can hardly see -- but the DEAFENING WIND and ROARING ENGINE tell us something's off here -- we pull back to see Johnny is indulging in two of his favorite things at once --

JOHNNY AND A GORGEOUS WOMAN ARE LOCKED IN A KISS

on two seperate motorcycles, tearing down a Texas desert highway at seventy miles an hour, with Johnny slightly ahead, so she can pull in close enough for the kiss.

After what seems a long moment, Johnny breaks off the kiss and opens his eyes -- as she pulls her cycle away, Johnny looks off to his right, towards a side road coming up --

JOHNNY'S POV - DOWN THE SIDE ROAD - THE OTI COMPLEX BUILDING

which has, like every space launch, a gigantic digital countdown clock set up outside for the public -- it reads **T-MINUS 00:44:00** --

ON THE MOTORCYCLE - JOHNNY

turns towards his girlfriend of this morning -- both SHOUT over the ROARING wind --

JOHNNY
-- Sorry, honey -- but I'm late for work --

GORGEOUS WOMAN
-- Where? --

JOHNNY
(grinning)
Outer space.

Johnny effortlessly curves the bike away, down a side exit --

GORGEOUS WOMAN
(shouts after him)
Will you call me?

DOWN THE ROAD - THE OTI COMPLEX

is several miles away, behind a pair of desert mountains -- and leading to it is a two-lane tangle of traffic parked on the shoulder, full of spectators here to see the launch.

Johnny races the cycle down the road, weaving in and out of cars, missing bumpers with 5 inch margins at 50 miles an hour -- as --

INSIDE THE LAUNCH AREA - THE FF-4

and its track are being attended to by a team of technicians. Ben, now fully suited up, approaches the ship's open cargo door.

INSIDE THE FF-4 CARGO AREA - REED

triple-checks the cargo. Ben climbs in -- and Reed pointedly locks one of the boxes. There's a tension between these men -- a battle of wills. Simply put, neither one likes to take orders.

BEN
We're T-minus forty minutes -- you finally gonna tell me what's in those crates?

REED
(for the thousandth time)
You know the mission protocol. I'll tell you when we get into the station. Not before.

Ignoring Ben, Reed moves to check the locks on another equipment box -- but Ben stops him with an arm in his chest.

BEN
Not good enough. I'm used to knowing what I'm carrying on any bird I'm piloting --

REED
(cuts him off)
I'm sure you're used to a lot of things, Grimm, but I'm in command of this mission --

BEN
(right back)
Sure. And I'm just the bus driver.
(hot)
I know you're "in charge" today because you designed this boat, and you wouldn't finish building it unless they made you the supreme captain of the universe or something --
(beat)
-- but remember, you gotta earn the right to give me an order. And mister, you're a long ways off from that.

With that, Ben climbs out of the cargo bay -- and Reed continues his job, a little steamed, SLAMMING down the box locks a little harder than necessary -- as we go to --

ON A TELEVISION SCREEN - A CNN REPORTER IS STANDING

outside the OTI complex, not far from the mission clock, but well ahead of the rest of the crowd that's turned out for the launch.

REPORTER (TO CAMERA)
This historic launch, to dock with the international space station Orion in orbit above Earth, is a mission of many firsts. It will be the first use of the reusable FF-4 "Phoenix" space plane and a new launch system, created by the Office of Technical Innovation's lead designer, Dr. Reed Richards.

The report jumps to --

VIDEOTAPE - REED, SUE, JOHNNY, AND BEN

are at a press conference, and Reed has the floor --

REED
-- This system, which replaces a conventional first stage booster rocket, will propel the ship along a three mile, high-velocity electromagnet coil until it fires the ship into the air like a bullet at Mach Three.

REED
This will allow us to carry less fuel, as well as more sensitive electronic equipment --

Reed rattles on, and Ben stifles a yawn, as the footage cuts to --

ANOTHER POINT IN THE PRESS CONFERENCE - JOHNNY

in aviator sunglasses and clearly relishing the attention, is chatting silently as the reporter's V.O. continues.

REPORTER (V.O.)
This flight crew also, historically, is something of a family affair: Dr. Susan Storm, last year's recipient of a MacArthur Foundation grant for her medical breakthroughs in psorelyn bonds, is the fiance and partner of Dr. Richards. When it was announced that she was part of the crew, Dr. Storm's brother, Air Force Major Johnathan Storm, a test pilot in his own right, volunteered for the mission.

The voice-over pauses as Johnny leans forward with a cocky grin --

JOHNNY (ON TAPE)
Well -- somebody's got to look out for my little sister.

Off Sue's slow burn -- the video footage abruptly changes to --

AN AIRPLANE EXPLODING IN MID-AIR

one split second after the pilot ejects -- this footage is followed by more footage, of a different plane crash and near-miss ejection -- and finally a third -- as we hear:

REPORTER (V.O.)
Richards and the OTI chiefs reportedly felt that Storm had earned his seat on the mission by test-piloting all three previous prototypes of the spacecraft.

CUT TO:

INT. THE MISSION PREP ROOM - JOHNNY

is getting into his flight suit, rapidly zipping and snapping -- and Sue comes in, a little steamed.

SUE
Glad you could make it. I had to cover for you for sneaking out of quarantine.

Johnny ignores this and continues his prep --

JOHNNY
You know, Sue, this might be a little out of your depth. This isn't like the usual test tube stuff you do with the mad professor --

SUE
It's not "test tubes" -- it's photon data transmission --

JOHNNY
-- Whatever --

SUE
-- and "the mad professor" is going to be your brother-in-law after we get back.

JOHNNY
(rolls his eyes)
Don't remind me -- Thanksgivings are going to be a blast from now on.
(beat)
Look, Sue -- I know you don't want to hear it, but all I'm saying is --
(serious)
-- this is outer space we're talking about. A million things can go wrong up there that you are just not trained to deal with.
(beat)
All I'm saying is, if you want to pull out, there's still time.

We see here two people who aren't communicating at all: Johnny is genuinely trying to be protective of his sister, but Sue is reading it as him being a condescending jerk.

SUE
(a little incredulous)
You're right. A lot can go wrong.
(beat)
If you're that nervous, we'll call your alternate.

Sue starts out --

JOHNNY
Sue --

SUE
I've got a responsibility on this flight. Maybe that's out of your depth.

Sue SLAMS out of the prep room -- and Johnny, frustrated that he can't ever get it right with his sister, finishes his prep.

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE OF TECHNICAL INNOVATION MISSION CONTROL - DAY

The nerve center of the ground base for the mission, a wall to wall room of computers and monitors, designed by Reed -- it's so technically advanced it makes the NASA Mission Control we're used to seeing look like it was designed by the Amish. Technicians are monitoring the condition of the craft in one section -- the launch track in another -- and the space station conditions elsewhere.

At the center of the jungle of computers and radios is DR. ERIC MACLEHR: the administrative head of OTI, and a colleague of Reed's, who is second to him in all respects -- a fact that clearly rankles him. He looks to the countdown clock --

MACLEHR (INTO RADIO)
-- Mission control to Phoenix --

INSIDE THE FF-4 COCKPIT - JOHNNY, BEN, REED AND SUE

are strapped in, as the radio comes to life --

MACLEHR (OVER RADIO)
We're at zero-minus forty seconds and counting. Confirm that you're checked through -- over --

Reed reaches for his cockpit microphone and opens his mouth to speak up -- but Ben does it first and faster, as if he weren't even there. A small slam, but a real one.

BEN
-- Final check through cleared. Actuate ship's electromagnets.

JOHNNY
Check --

Johnny hits the appropriate toggles --

AN ELECTROMAGNET UNDERNEATH THE SHIP ACTIVATES

-- pushing the ship up under a two foot magnetic cushion -- it's now positioned to go into the center of the magnetic coil --

INSIDE THE FF-4 COCKPIT - BEN

is running the rest of the sequence for launch --

BEN
Warming up second stage engines --

As the engines start up with an electronic HUM --

OUTSIDE THE COMPLEX - HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE

in cars and camped outside the gates are suddenly silent, watching the countdown clock tick down -- **00:00:10** -- **00:00:09** --

INSIDE MISSION CONTROL - TECHNICIANS

are coolly but quickly working their controls --

INSIDE THE FF-4 COCKPIT

Ben is about to speak again -- but this time Reed makes a point of keying his microphone first --

REED
Mission control -- run launch sequence --

Reed eyes the ship's clock -- it's at **00:00:01** and turning over --

REED
-- **now** --

THE TUNNEL'S MAGNETIC COIL ACTIVATES

-- by turning on the magnet closest to the ship -- it's drawn in, slowly at first, like a train pulling away from a station --

-- but as the electromagnetic coil accelerates --

INSIDE FF-4 - FRONT VIEW OUT COCKPIT - **THE COIL**

is activating, faster and faster -- within several seconds, a digital meter on the instrument panel indicates the ship is travelling at 100 mph already and is rapidly climbing --

OUTSIDE THE COMPLEX - THE SPECTATORS

The only noise out here is a deep bass RUMBLE coming from underground -- everyone is pointing to --

THE MOUNTAIN BEHIND THE OTI COMPLEX

As the FF-4 is passing underground, its sonic vibrations are blasting rocks loose like a travelling earthquake --

INSIDE THE FF-4 - THE TRACK

is curving upward -- the airspeed indicator shows that they're crossing 500 mph, and they haven't left the ground yet --

-- until finally --

AT THE MOUTH OF THE MOUNTAIN TUNNEL - **THE SHIP BLASTS OUT**

like an aerodynamic bullet with no fire, no smoke, but a hell of a **BOOM** as it smashes through the sound barrier and tracks straight up toward orbit --

INSIDE THE COCKPIT - REED

is grimacing against the three-G pull -- Johnny notices his discomfort and is enjoying it a little --

JOHNNY
Relax, Reed -- that's just the first stage.
(flips switches)
This is my favorite part --
(finger pauses on one button)
-- **flame on**!

On that, Johnny punches the "SECOND STAGE BOOST" switch -- and --

THE REAR ROCKETS KICK ON

with a deafening **ROAR** and an enormous **FIREBALL**, hurtling the ship up into escape velocity --

INSIDE MISSION CONTROL - A STATIC-RIDDEN SCREAM

BLASTS out of a communications speaker -- there's so much sub-orbital static that it's hard to tell what's going on, but it sounds like a scream of agony. MacLehr rushes to the intercom --

MACLEHR
-- Mission Control to Phoenix -- request immediate status report. Is anything wrong?

INSIDE THE FF-4 COCKPIT - JOHNNY

is HOWLING like a banshee over the rush of the blastoff -- Ben reaches over and shuts off a microphone in front of Johnny --

BEN (INTO RADIO)
This is Phoenix -- all systems go at zero plus forty-four seconds --
(beat)
-- nothing's wrong, except you forgot the sign at the launch gate saying "You Must Be At Least Five Years Old To Get On This Ride".
(turns to Johnny)
"Flame on"?

Johnny shrugs it off -- and --

THE FF-4 REACHES ESCAPE VELOCITY

shaking off the last of the Earth's atmosphere, tracking through the void of space -- until --

We can't see what they're heading toward in the blackness of space -- until there's a sudden flareup of light -- revealing --

THE INTERNATIONAL SPACE STATION "ORION"

in high orbit above the Earth. The flareup came from sunlight catching the huge solar power panels that fan out in all directions on the upper fringe of the state. Beneath these is a spider-like amalgamation of pods and passageways built around a central core of the station -- and jutting out like legs beneath it are four docking ports.

The FF-4 flies into view -- and starts the process of coordinating its speed with the station, which is rocketing along on thrusters mounted in the docking ports to maintain its orbital path --

BEN (O.S., RADIO)
-- Phoenix on docking approach -- over --

As the ship tracks parallel to one of the docking ports --

INSIDE FF-4 COCKPIT - BEN

is focused on gently pulling back the speed of the ship to match the docking port. Even though there are instruments in front of him showing, to the third decimal point, the relative speeds of ship and station, this is too high-tech for Ben -- he's just eyeballing it out the window. Ultimately --

THE FF-4 PULLS UNDERNEATH THE DOCKING PORT

and is magnetically drawn towards it to bridge the last several inches -- the top hatch of the plane matches perfectly with the exterior hatch of the docking port. As it finally locks in --

IN THE FF-4 COCKPIT - BEN

hits a toggle -- and the ship's overhead hatch opens up, revealing they're locked right under the docking bay's low hatch. Ben reaches up with a metal tool -- in effect, a key that he turns in an oversized keyhole, and the hatch above irises open.

A moment later --

INT. INSIDE A STATION PASSAGEWAY - JOHNNY

is having a great time in the zero gravity, flying and spiralling through the length of one of the connecting passageways, passing

REED AND SUE - AT A WINDOW

overlooking a momentarily darkened earth -- Reed's excitement is just as strong as Johnny's, but it takes a different form.

REED
(pointing out)
-- you can see it, just starting -- there --

Out the window -- an orbital sunrise burns in just under the earth -- a uniquely thrilling sight.

REED
Now, this was worth postponing the wedding, wasn't it?

Unnoticed by Reed, Sue's smile weakens a bit -- Reed's hit a sore spot. Before she responds -- a voice like an icy breeze breaks in:

VICTOR (O.S.)
It is a magnificent sight, isn't it?

Sue and Reed turn to face

VICTOR OBRETCH

a driven, aloof Russian man in his thirties, looking out at the view dispassionately, and crossing closer to them. He is handsome and brilliant -- and unspeakably arrogant about both qualities.

VICTOR
There are forty-two per day -- when you multiply that times the two hundred and twelve days I have been stationed here --
(shrugs)
The novelty has waned a bit for me, I'm afraid. I apologize for not being on hand for your docking, but I was finishing preparations for tomorrow.

VICTOR
(extends hand)
After exchanging data for the last ten months, it is good to meet you at last -- you must be Reed Richards.

They shake hands -- Reed is friendly, but Victor seems to see this courtesy as a formality that's just getting in the way of work.

REED
A pleasure -- you must be Victor Obretch.

A voice breaks in from behind Reed:

BEN (O.S.)
And you must be the genius everybody says you are, Richards.

Reed turns -- and Ben emerges from the docking cylinder, with the last of the equipment boxes Reed locked earlier. This one is open.

BEN
One guy posted in the whole station, and you can figure out who he is with brain wattage to spare.
(indicates open latch)
Sorry, Richards -- but when I was unloading this equipment, the latch fell open. Now, I'm no rocket scientist -- but --

Ben reaches into the crate, and the contents float out: it's not some high-tech machinery -- it's a rotten, gnarled, wooden log.

BEN
-- I don't see why this is top secret.

CUT TO:

INT. COMPUTER CONTROL MODULE - REED AND VICTOR

enter, with Johnny, Ben and Sue following right behind. The module is tightly packed with next-generation computers designed by Reed and Victor -- and pride in that shows in Reed's attitude.

As a matter of geography, we see through a porthole where this module is relative to the rest of the station: it's in the center, beneath the solar panels and between the four docking cylinders.

Reed turns on one of the computer screens - it reveals a 3-D model of a molecule's atomic structure.

REED
For years, I've been working on a new branch of science -- nanotechnology. The idea -- and up to now, all it's been is an idea -- is that you can take atoms -- the smallest units of molecules -- and rearrange them any way you like. Into anything you like.

Reed changes the screen, showing an enlarged, blurry photograph of the white-lettered "OTI" logo, made of bulbous single atoms.

REED
This photo of an OTI logo is enlarged twenty-five thousand times. It took me six months to manipulate individual atoms into a stable pattern with an electron microscope -- but it proved that nanotech is possible.
(beat)
The smallest mechanical manipulation ever -- with the largest possible impact on our world.

Reed's excitement with this topic is growing -- but it isn't infectuous. Ben is, so far, underwhelmed.

BEN
Well, congratulations, Richards. They said it couldn't be done, and you did it.
(beat)
You invented a billboard for bacteria.

VICTOR
(condescending)
Is that all you can see? This is the first step toward control of the smallest unit of matter -- the smallest unit of life.

REED
Stay with me. It'll get clearer.
(beat)
There are many problems with assembly on a molecular level. One is that it's too slow a process to assemble objects by manipulating atoms one at a time. With billions upon billions of atoms in, say, a wristwatch, individual movement is out of the question.
(beat)
And, there hasn't been a computer powerful enough to process the atomic movement -- there hasn't been a way to power the molecular movement -- and there hasn't been a way to create self- replicating machines.
(beat)
Then I found out about Victor's research. It turns out that Victor and I were working on the same problem from different angles.

Victor takes over, pointing to a row of computers. Unlike Reed, there is not the slightest shade of modesty in his description.

VICTOR
I created this, originally, to control the entire Soviet defense network. Of course, it is no longer necessary for that purpose.
(proudly)
Dr. Richards will confirm it is the first and only working teraflops computer in the world.

JOHNNY
(rolls his eyes)
Oh. You're right. This is getting clearer.

REED
What he means is, it can process up to one trillion bits of floating information per second. That makes it more powerful than the five biggest computers on earth combined. It runs hot, but we'll need the power.
(beat)
While he built that, I had perfected a way of powering massive, yet individually directed, atomic migrations through photonic data transmission radiated in a sealed container.
(smiles at Victor)
Both devices together solve all the theoretical problems.

Ben is exasperated by now -- the jargon's getting too thick --

BEN
Okay, okay -- he got chocolate in your peanut butter and you got peanut butter on his chocolate -- begging the question --
(beat)
-- who cares?

Reed changes the display screen to a molecular model, labelled "MOLECULAR MODEL: WOOD" --

REED
Everyone will. The practical uses of this science are limited only by our imagination. Once it's perfected, we can change wood --

Reed hits a key -- the molecule changes structure, and we see that it really is just a matter of rearranging a few parts of the molecule, until it reads "MOLECULAR MODEL: GOLD" --

REED
-- into gold. It's alchemy, Ben, but it's real. We'll be able to make food from garbage, or modern buildings out of slums. We can end hunger and poverty. The ugly can be made beautiful -- the most useless thing in the world can be made into the most valuable.

Johnny claps Ben on the back --

JOHNNY
Hear that, big guy? There's hope for you yet.

Ben shrugs this off as Reed punches up something else on the screen: a series of DNA strands being altered --

REED
Ultimately, we will be able to work on humans.

REED
Someday this technology can battle disease -- rebuild cancerous organs from the inside out -- regenerate missing limbs -- or repair virtually any physical malady. It'll be a new age for humanity --

Reed points out the module's porthole, toward what appears to be one of the docking cylinders at another point in the station.

REED
-- and it begins tomorrow. Right over there.

CUT TO:

INT. STATION HATCH - VIEW UNDERNEATH

The hatch door irises open, revealing Johnny, Sue and Ben are there with Reed, who is wearing a headset radio and pointing down.

REED
Over the last few months, Victor's rebuilt this docking cylinder to my specifications.
(beat)
I call it a nanochamber.

BENEATH THEM - **THE NANOCHAMBER**

is an eight foot cylinder of tiny, intricate pinpoint lenses, built into the walls themselves, meshed together above a platform.

REED
This cylinder is lined with hundreds of thousands of blue lasers, each with a bandwidth just narrow enough to individually recast the shapes of molecules.
(into radio)
Run the test program, Victor.

IN THE COMPUTER CONTROL MODULE - VICTOR

activates the nanochamber's control computer -- and --

INSIDE THE NANOCHAMBER - **AN INTRICATE MESH OF MICROLASERS ACTIVATE**

-- their blue beams criss-crossing to carve shapes of light in a coordinated, deliberate manner. It looks like a hologram, but the clarity and density of the figures is far beyond that technology.

REED
Every one of those lasers can accomplish in a millisecond more molecular sculpting than I could in a lifetime. Under the coordination of this computer, we can remake the composition of any object within seconds.
(into radio)
All right -- cut the test, Victor.

As the lasers go dead, Reed and the others lean up --

IN THE PASSAGEWAY ABOVE THE NANOCHAMBER

Reed looks proud and hopeful. Ben, however, looks suspicious.

REED
That's the theory, anyway. Tomorrow we'll see if it'll really work.

BEN
I guess there's a really good reason you couldn't do this down on Earth.

REED
There's two reasons, actually. One is that the microgravity environment of the space station will make the assemblies easier -- and the second is --

VICTOR (O.S.)
-- a very minor factor of risk.

Victor shows up in the passageway -- and Ben, his suspicion confirmed, turns to Reed --

BEN
"Risk"?

REED
(conceding)
We're working with rearrangement of inorganic molecules on a huge scale -- and the only thing that makes that possible is the unprecedented speed of the computer running the assembly. It's that speed that gives it an element of unpredictability.
(beat)
It's possible -- barely possible -- that any directed reassembly of molecules could spread in the form of self-replicating micromachines to alter the station's structural integrity.

BEN
In English, I guess that means the whole damn place could fall apart. Or we could get microwaved into little piles of glop.

VICTOR
(a haughty laugh)
With this technology? Impossible --

BEN
That's what they said at Chernobyl, Doc.
(beat)
Let me know when you're done. Meantime, I'll be as far away from this gizmo as possible.

Ben walks away, turning down a corridor corner, leaving everyone a little thrown by his attitude -- and --

DOWN THE CORRIDOR - BEN

keeps walking -- and Johnny runs up behind him for a jab --

JOHNNY
Hey, Grimm --
(catches up)
-- if you spook so easily, why'd you volunteer for this trip?

Ben turns around, poker-faced --

BEN
I didn't. NASA drafted me to go on one last ride to cover for you.
(off Johnny's look)
Seems the brass there thinks you're a hot-stick artist who'll take any risk for a big enough thrill, but that when the real trouble starts you'll fold like an accordion.

JOHNNY
(pissed)
Where'd they get that?

Ben almost -- almost, but not quite -- smiles --

BEN
From the evaluation I wrote when I was your instructor at MacDill.
(turns to walk away)
See you later, kid -- I'm gonna grab some sleep. Don't break anything while I'm gone.

Off Johnny's sore look -- we --

CUT TO:

INT. COMPUTER CONTROL MODULE - REED

is busily installing some electronic equipment brought up from the ship, as Victor angrily stalks in.

VICTOR
It appears that you have been less than direct with me as well, Dr. Richards.
(incensed)
I have checked the manifest of your ship. And I do not see any notation of the experimental animals I require.

Reed pulls himself out of the circuit boards, as Victor turns on the mainframe computer -- on its monitor, a status line reads **RUNNING BIO-NANO PROGRAM**.

VICTOR
This is why we came. This is what we worked for. This is what I've spent years designing.

Victor's fingers dance along the keyboard, starting a simulation like the one we saw earlier, with molecular models flashing by -- but in this, the models are flying by with nearly subliminal speed, and we see they have biological tags: **MOLECULAR MODEL: MUSCLE PROTEINS, MOLECULAR MODEL: PLASMA BONDS,** etc.

VICTOR
With this computer and the models loaded into the program, it can create according to direction -- it can deconstruct, and rapidly reconstruct, any living organism.
(exasperated)
But it is, without test subjects, a meaningless simulation.

Reed eyes the program, and Victor, with some doubt.

REED
I went over your program on Earth, Victor -- carefully -- and it's just not ready.
(before Victor can retort)
Molecular reconstruction of living subjects is far more complicated than that of inanimate materials. Your base math formula for the reconstruction process --
(shakes his head)
-- it's got too many random factors. There's no way to tell what you'd wind up with.

Victor hits the keyboard again -- accelerating the program so that the molecular models flash by at an incomprehensible speed.

VICTOR
That is precisely the point.
(indicates screen)
With each cycle, the randomness built into the program will work with the organism, and adapt with it -- just like natural evolution. But instead of taking one million years, this can be achieved in seconds.

REED
Maybe. But with the anomalies I saw, it would be irresponsible and reckless to --

VICTOR
(furious)
Are you abolutely devoid of vision? We are on the threshold of redefining the nature of life itself -- this is no time to be timid.

REED
(right back)
Wrong. It's exactly the time. This is too important for us to get it wrong.

Reed angrily shuts down the computer -- and tries to calm himself and Victor down a bit, as Sue arrives in the doorway.

REED
Look -- we still have to make sure the nanochamber will build inanimate objects. If it does, we'll work on your figures for a future mission. All right?

Victor relents, his manner growing cold.

VICTOR
As you wish, Dr. Richards. The matter was settled, in any case, when you denied me my shipment of lab animals.

Victor turns and stalks out past Sue, who steps out of his way, and moves in toward Reed.

CUT TO:

INT. SPACE STATION - VICTOR'S QUARTERS

are the featureless, mechanized womb you'd expect him to live in. Victor enters, fuming, and turns on a computer work station mounted on a wall. As he furiously taps into the keyboard --

THE SCREEN

reads: **STATION MAIN CONTROL SYSTEM - ENTERING PROGRAM.** As --

VICTOR

continues working, driven, we --

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SPACE STATION - A GUIDANCE THRUSTER

fires a jet of compressed gas from the top of the station -- as --

FLIGHT CONTROLLER (O.S., RADIO)
Good morning, Orion --

INT. OFFICE OF TECHNICAL INNOVATION MISSION CONTROL - DAY

The flight controller is on the radio -- the team of technicians is at their respective consoles, monitoring operations.

FLIGHT CONTROLLER (INTO RADIO)
We hate to wake you up with bad news, but --

INT. SPACE STATION - REED AND SUE'S QUARTERS

Sue is asleep, floating in a hammock-like harness designed for weightless rest. Reed, who has clearly been up for some time, is looking out the porthole at the stars -- he reaches across Sue's drifting body to turn the speaker down before it can wake her.

FLIGHT CONTROLLER (OVER RADIO)
-- our main computer's found a malfunctioning part on guidance thruster number three --

IN ANOTHER PART OF THE SPACE STATION - THE GALLEY

Johnny and Ben are having breakfast: Johnny is sipping coffee from a sealed, zero-gravity "mug", while Ben is unsuccessfully trying to tear the plastic open on some kind of breakfast brick.

FLIGHT CONTROLLER (OVER RADIO)
-- you need to get that fixed as soon as possible, or you'll be pushed into an incorrect orbit pattern -- over --

REED (OVER RADIO)
Copy, mission control -- we'll repair ASAP.

Ben, who's still having some trouble tearing his food open, seems sure he's not going to pull the duty.

BEN
Sounds like your morning's mapped out, kid.

JOHNNY
(lightly)
Oh, no no no -- remember, we're equally ranked in this box, Grimster. Tell you what --
(reaches into zipper pocket)
-- instead of using my pull with my brother-in-law -- I mean, our commander -- I'll flip you for it.

Johnny pulls a half dollar out of the pocket and flips it up lightly -- but in the reduced gravity, it just hangs in place, continuing to spin endlessly. It looks like it could go on for half an hour. Johnny nonchalantly turns to Ben --

JOHNNY
Well? You going to call it or not?

Ben tosses his breakfast bar up, and pushes away from the table.

BEN
Ahh, forget it -- if I don't get out of this box for an hour, I'll wind up nuttier than the Frankenstein twins.
(starts out)
I'm going to suit up. See you in twenty.

Ben walks out, and Johnny absently flicks the coin to start it spinning horizontally instead of vertically -- as he reaches for Ben's breakfast, we CUT TO --

INT. NANOCOMPUTER CONTROL MODULE - REED

enters to find Victor is already there. His manner is oddly friendly, as if they'd had no disagreement at all.

VICTOR
(cheery)
Ah -- good morning, Dr. Richards.

REED
Good morning --

Victor turns on the system: a camera monitor shows the log has been placed in the nanochamber, while a bank of computer monitors show that the status of the construction is **AWAITING COMMAND**.

VICTOR
Now that you have arrived, all of the preparations are complete. We may proceed.

Victor turns and thoughtfully looks out the porthole --

THE PORTHOLE VIEW OF EARTH

is breathtaking -- the blue oceans and white clouds are in the forefront, while the sun is backlighting it from behind --

VICTOR
It was unthinkable, just a few years ago, that we could share the same view of creation held only by God.
(beat)
Now, it is commonplace.

Victor turns again to face Reed --

VICTOR
It was just as unthinkable until today that man could seize the throne of God -- but in a moment, you and I shall.

Reed is visibly uncomfortable with this kind of talk.

VICTOR
Do not deny it, Dr. Richards. You and I both became scientists to change the world -- no, to recreate the world in our own image. That goal is why we put up with the military meddling with our projects -- that is why we're here today. Correct?

REED
Let's just see if it works first, Victor.
(starts hitting controls)
First test cycle -- starting now --

The control computer hums to life -- and --

IN THE NANOCHAMBER - **THE BLUE LASER MESH**

activates in a rising spiral of several hundred thousand beams around the log, floating in weightlessness -- a blaze of photonic sparks fly off it, and finally envelop it --

IN THE NANOCONTROL MODULE - VICTOR AND REED

watch breathlessly -- at this point, the camera monitor is showing a blinding display of color -- until --

-- the control computer issues a completing BEEP -- and the camera monitor shows the program is finished.

INSIDE THE NANOCHAMBER - **A GLEAMING SHAFT OF PERFECT STEEL**

has been formed from the raw material of the log.

INSIDE THE NANOCONTROL MODULE - VICTOR AND REED

are both beyond awed -- one computer screen shows the line **LASER ANALYSIS OF MOLECULAR COMPOSTION: STEEL.**

VICTOR
Today, Richards --
(beat)
-- we are gods.

-- as --

OUTSIDE THE STATION - **UNDER THE GIRDER FRAMEWORK** - BEN

is crawling around the outside of the upper part of the station -- his life-support systems are self-contained inside the suit, but he still has a lifeline tethering him to the station's top. As he makes his way toward a steering thruster --

BEN (OVER RADIO)
-- Confirm the fuel supply for thruster number three is off --

INSIDE CENTRAL CONTROL MODULE - JOHNNY

is working with Ben, all business for a change --

BEN (OVER RADIO)
-- if the hydrogen kicks in while I'm changing the part, I'm going to wind up as "Comet Benjamin" -- over --

JOHNNY (INTO RADIO)
Sounds like fun.
(taps computer keys)
Hydrogen supply negative.

The computer screen shows a graphic of the station, with the line **HYDROGEN SUPPLY 0% THRUSTER THREE** -- but --

INSIDE VICTOR'S QUARTERS - THE COMPUTER

there has activated and is running a preset program -- on this screen, we see: **MAIN STATION CONTROL BYPASSED. THRUSTER THREE HYDROGEN SUPPLY AUTOMATICALLY REACTIVATES 100% IN 120 SECONDS** --

-- as --

IN NANOCONTROL MODULE - VICTOR

is turned away from Reed, and looking at a small computer screen that shows the same line. It's clear that whatever's happening outside is his doing.

Reed, meanwhile, is breathlessly continuing the experiment --

REED
This is astonishing -- Victor, look at this --

At the nanochamber's monitors, we see a second conversion is in process. Reed excitedly points to a computer analysis screen --

REED
The steel is changing into a ceramic compound that's stronger than any metal in existance --
(excited)
-- and that material never existed anywhere before, except as a molecular theory. Do you realize what this means? Anything that can be imagined can go directly from the design stage to reality with this device.
(almost overcome)
There's no limit to it.

VICTOR
No. No limit at all.

Victor turns away to surreptitiously look at the side screen --

CLOSE ON COMPUTER SCREEN

-- it reads **THRUSTER THREE HYDROGEN SUPPLY REACTIVATING AT 100%** --

OUTSIDE THE SPACE STATION - BEN

works to get the case off the thruster, POUNDING it with a tool --

VIEW ON BEN'S FACE BEHIND HELMET SCREEN

concentrating on the job -- he rears back to POUND the casing again -- as --

INSIDE CENTRAL CONSOLE - JOHNNY

hears a WARNING BEEP from the screen -- he looks down, alarmed, because it's just now showing that hydrogen's back on --

JOHNNY
Shit -- Ben -- the hydrogen's been --

OUTSIDE SPACE STATION - CLOSE ON BEN'S HELMET

-- In the visor glass, we see the reflection of Ben's hand completing the downward swing -- and Ben's too-late realization --

JOHNNY (OVER RADIO)
-- reactivated --

On that word, Ben completes the swing -- the tool connects -- and there must be a spark inside the housing, because

THE HOUSING BLASTS APART IN AN EXPLOSION

that is as powerful as it is silent -- Ben is hurled backwards, end over end -- his lifeline is severed at its base, trailing behind him uselessly. Nothing can stop him from going into permanent orbit -- until --

-- Ben **collides with the girder framework** -- his body SMASHES against it, and his lifeline tangles in the framework --

CLOSE ON BEN'S FACE

-- Ben audiably GASPING for air, in shock from the blast as small bits of station debris fly past him -- but he's also determined to get back in. Before he can assess his situation, though --

THRUSTER THREE'S HOUSING LETS LOOSE ANOTHER EXPLOSION

-- this one at least as powerful as the last blast -- but it **structurally weakens the girder framework** -- the array **bends in half and clearly will break**, dangling by one twisted beam, two hundred and forty-five miles over Earth --

-- and the half that's going to break off into space is the half **that has Ben tethered to it** -- meanwhile --

INSIDE THE STATION CONTROL MODULE - JOHNNY AND SUE

look at the monitors showing Ben's predicament -- the lights in the station are blinking out, the computers are unresponsive --

SUE
(worried)
Can he get back in?

JOHNNY
(working computers)
I don't know -- the system's frozen up --

ON THE MONITOR IN FRONT OF JOHNNY - THE COMPUTER

is listing all the hatches in the station -- but a "STATUS" line after each of them reads **"LOCKED"** -- as --

IN THE NANOCONTROL MODULE - REED

looks out the porthole and sees what's happened to Ben --

REED
My God -- he'll be dragged off --

Victor, meanwhile, is looking down at his screen which monitors the program he's fed into the station's control system --

THE SIDE SCREEN

reads: **ALL ELECTRICAL POWER ROUTED TO NANOSYSTEM**

AWAITING COMMAND

INSIDE THE DANGLING GIRDERS - BEN

is climbing up the framework as quickly as he can -- but he also has to be somewhat delicate, as the girder framework is **twisting** -- it's being dragged along by the continuing orbital track of the station, hanging by two bent metallic threads that could fall away from the station at any moment.

Ben crawls up the girders inch by inch, climbing his own lifeline, which is tangled in the girders near the break -- until finally, he's almost up to the break, and the nearest part of the station. Ben reaches for where his lifeline's caught -- he's not going anywhere until this is loosened -- but not only is it ensnarled in the girders, a piece of metal has crunched down on it.

Ben yanks the line as hard as he can -- to no effect -- just as --

ONE OF THE TWO METAL STRANDS HOLDING THE FRAMEWORK ON BREAKS OFF

-- the girders twist, knocking Ben out of the framework --

-- **the framework is dangling more precariously and twisting -- while Ben is hanging, powerless, from his lifeline** --

BEN'S HELMET POV - THE EARTH

is far below -- the void of space is all around him --

BEN CLIMBS UP THE LIFELINE TOWARD THE GIRDER FRAMEWORK

which is whipping around from being towed by the station, each twist it takes weakening the support --

-- Ben finally reaches the girder framework, just as --

THE GIRDER FRAMEWORK TEARS COMPLETELY FREE OF THE STATION

and is floating past it -- Ben is still gripping the framework's edge -- he looks ahead --

BEN'S HELMET POV - DOCKING MODULE FOUR

is coming up fast, the only corner of the station within reach -- if he can't grab it, he's going to be in permanent orbit --

ON THE GIRDERS

which are tossing in rotation and moving away fast -- Ben's got just one choice -- he climbs to the top edge of the girders, and as it passes underneath the bottom of the docking module --

-- **Ben leaps off toward the module bottom, his lifeline being dragged after him as the girders irrevocably go by** -- with the single leap, Ben has to reach the bottom of the module before the girders he's tethered to drag him away --

VIEW DOWN FROM DOCKING MODULE FOUR - BEN

hits the module's edge roughly -- there's nothing to hold onto -- Ben's tether goes taut, **dragging him off** -- but Ben finally gets a handhold on a hatch railing under the module, grabbing on as tightly as he can in the suit -- meaning

THE GIRDERS DRAG BEHIND THE STATION FROM BEN'S TETHER

-- all that holds the ton of metal is the line, and Ben's grip --

VIEW DOWN FROM DOCKING MODULE FOUR - BEN

grimaces with the effort, his grip slipping -- but --

THE LIFELINE TEARS OUT OF BEN'S SUIT

and the girder framework falls away, leaving Ben hanging on the outside of the ship -- to make matters worse --

-- Ben's spacesuit has **torn** where the line popped out -- it's instantly **decompressing** -- and so is

BEN

who knows exactly how many different kinds of trouble he's in -- without the suit, he's dead in thirty seconds. With one hand awkwardly gripping the station, as he's battered by small debris shooting past him, he reaches out with his free hand to hit a button that reads **EMERGENCY HATCH ENTRANCE** --

-- Ben hits it -- and hits it again -- with no response.

IN STATION CONTROL MODULE - JOHNNY AND SUE

Johnny has stepped back to let Sue take over on the system -- she's frantically trying to get the computers to work --

JOHNNY
Do something -- he's stuck out there!

SUE
I can't -- All the hatches to that module are sealed, and the circuits aren't responding --

OUTSIDE THE STATION - BEN

hits the button again, to no effect -- his face shows his fear, his frustration, and the physical effects of his decompression --

Ben stops hitting the button -- there's no point. Next to it is the same simple, oversized keyhole we saw Ben use to open a hatch earlier. Problem is, Ben has no simple, oversized key -- unless --

-- Ben turns to look at the girder debris, still battering him -- it's different sized metal shards, coming out of Thruster Three. Ben eyes them carefully -- and snatches one that looks about right out of the void as it goes by --

-- Ben takes the "key", awkwardly forces it into the lock, and it turns -- the hatch irises open, and Ben drags himself in -- as --

IN THE STATION CONTROL MODULE - JOHNNY AND SUE

Sue's still trying to get control, but the system is unresonsive --

SUE
All the station's power's being cut off --

JOHNNY
(points to screen)
Not quite -- your boyfriend's tanning booth is still running, and Ben's roasting in it.

Johnny shoves away from the control console, and starts running down the station -- Sue shouts after him --

SUE
You can't get through to him!

JOHNNY
(shouting back)
Not from the inside I can't --

Johnny springs from the module into --

A HORIZONTAL PASSAGEWAY - JOHNNY WEIGHTLESSLY "FLIES"

through the passage as quickly as he can propel himself -- not as a goof, but because it's the fastest way to --

-- a vertical docking shaft -- Johnny kicks off the ceiling and dives into it -- and into --

THE OPEN COCKPIT OF THE PHOENIX

where Johnny starts powering up the ship -- as --

IN THE NANOCONTROL MODULE - REED

is looking with horror at Ben's predicament --

REED
He's stuck in there -- Victor, shut everything down --

But Victor is hovering over the side screen that shows his sabotage program -- hesitating for a moment -- but just a moment -- he presses the "ENTER" key on the keyboard -- and

THE NANOCOMPUTER REACTIVATES

with a monitor screen showing: **BIO-NANO PROGRAM: ACTIVE** --

CLOSE ON REED'S HORRIFIED FACE

-- this is the very last thing he wanted to happen: the machine he thought would change the world into paradise is killing a man --

INSIDE THE NANOCHAMBER - BEN

is, to put it mildly, also upset -- he hears the HUMMING of the machine, and he jumps up to SLAM against the top hatch, but it's useless, especially considering he's weightless -- he lands, as --

-- **the blue laser mesh starts at his feet** -- as --

OUTSIDE THE DOCKING PORT - THE PHOENIX

disconnects from the docking port -- its engines ignite --

INSIDE THE PHOENIX - JOHNNY STEERS THE SHIP

to dock with the nanochamber's docking module. While --

INSIDE THE NANOCONTROL MODULE - REED

is frantically trying to work the computer controls -- but they're locked in and unresponsive. Reed looks at the screen, aghast --

REED
It's running the biological program -- there's no telling what'll happen to him --

Victor is, unnervingly, as cool as Reed is rattled --

VICTOR
Precisely.

Reed looks at Victor, stunned, realizing what he's done.

REED
Are you insane?

Victor puts a calming hand on Reed's shoulder.

VICTOR
Let the program run its course, Dr. Richards. The greatest advances in scientific history have occurred through such "accidents".
(beat)
The advance we are achieving today for humanity is simply beyond calculation.

Reed throws off Victor's hand -- and pulls away --

REED
(incredulous)
An "advance for humanity"? By killing a man?
(beat)
You've got to turn it off --

VICTOR
(calmly)
You may as well savor our victory -- the controls are locked in --

REED
Then I'm getting him out before it's too late.

Angrily, Reed turns to run down the corridor, as Victor continues to monitor the program --

INSIDE THE NANOCHAMBER - BEN

is caught in the fully-active laser mesh, swirling around his body -- in the blinding atomic glow, only Ben's struggling silhoette is visible -- as --

IN THE NANOCONTROL MODULE - VICTOR

stares at the transformation's progress with fascination, and a surge of power -- it's not possible to see what's happening to Ben, but the monitor reads **MOLECULAR COMPOSITION: UNKNOWN** --

-- what Victor doesn't notice is another monitor flashes **CIRCUIT COOLING FAILURE** -- the computer is running too hot.

IN A STATION CORRIDOR - REED

runs up to a sealed hatchway leading toward the chamber -- he tries the local opening mechanism, which doesn't work. Reed quickly takes out several small screwdrivers to pop off the faceplate of the opener, as Sue runs up behind him -- while --

ON EARTH - IN MISSION CONTROL

Technicians frantically monitor their consoles amid panicked crosstalk, as MacLehr stalks over to the flight controller --

MACLEHR
What the hell's happening up there?

FLIGHT CONTROLLER
The electrical system software's gone crazy -- and the ship's undocked --

The controller looks down at a monitor and goes white --

MACLEHR
What? Something <u>else</u> is going wrong?

FLIGHT CONTROLLER
Their guidance thrusters -- they were set to overcompensate for the one that was out --
(beat)
-- it's going to push them into a low orbit.

MACLEHR
<u>How</u> low?

The only answer he can manage is a stunned, grim look --

VIEW OF STATION - GUIDANCE THRUSTERS FIRE OUT OF CONTROL

and are **pushing the station down in a lopsided spiral** --

-- which is making it harder for the Phoenix to match the course and stay underneath the docking module -- but --

INSIDE PHOENIX - JOHNNY

finally gets under the module, and magnetically clamps onto the hatch. As it engages, Johnny opens the overhead hatch -- and --

INSIDE NANOCHAMBER - THE BOTTOM HATCH

underneath Ben opens -- and Johnny's hand shoots up, grabbing Ben's ankle to pull him down and out of the laser mesh.

INSIDE PHOENIX - BEN

who is dazed and near unconsciousness, is dragged down into the seat by Johnny -- as --

ON TOP OF THE STATION - AN UPPER THRUSTER EXPLODES

in a silent, gaseous fireball that nonetheless tears one of the docking modules off --

INSIDE THE STATION - **THE EXPLOSION**

an certainly be heard here, in a muffled, echoing **BOOM** -- and as the torn docking module vanishes, hatches automatically seal ahead of it to retain the atmoshpere.

IN THE STATION CORRIDOR - REED

jams a screwdriver into the circuitry, shorting the controls until the hatch can be manually opened. Sue, frightened, looks out a porthole, at the docking module flying by -- Reed forces open the hatch, and grabs Sue to drag her through the hatchway --

REED
One more to go -- we've got two minutes, maximum, to get off this thing --

IN THE NANOCONTROL MODULE - VICTOR

looks at this, upset because it's all slipping away --

FLIGHT CONTROLLER (THROUGH INTERCOM)
-- This is Mission Control to Orion -- your electrical power is failing, your lateral thrusters are out of control, and your guidance system is at one hundred percent failure -- you must evacuate immediately --

Victor doesn't see the screen reading **COOLANT FAILURE CRITICAL** --

IN THE STATION CORRIDOR - REED AND SUE

run through the corridor, which is tilting from the out-of-control thrusters, bending from structural stress, and sparking everywhere from electrical failure. They finally reach the top hatch for the vertical shaft leading down to the Phoenix -- and --

REED'S POV THROUGH PORTHOLE GLASS - THE LASER MESH

is active -- he can see the open cockpit, and Johnny waiting there, but he and Sue would have to dive through the molecular blender to get to it. Before Reed has time to ponder that one --

INSIDE THE NANOCONTROL MODULE - THE COMPUTER'S COOLANT SYSTEM

reaches critical heat -- the tanks behind the computer **explode into Victor's face,** hurling him back --

-- the nanocomputer isn't physically damaged by the blast, but its power cuts out -- meaning --

INSIDE THE NANOCHAMBER - THE LASER MESH

has stopped dead --

INSIDE THE PHOENIX - JOHNNY

looks up and sees the laser mesh has cleared -- he jumps up into the chamber, with a key for manual hatch opening --

AT THE OTHER SIDE OF THE HATCH - REED AND SUE

look down as Johnny comes up to open the hatch -- Reed stands up --

REED
Get in the ship -- I'm going to find Victor.

SUE
Reed -- there's no time --

REED
(already gone)
We can't leave him behind --

Reed runs down the corridor, which is rapidly filling with smoke, and is sparking from spreading electrical fires --

-- and after turning a corner, Reed must stop -- a tank venting flammable gas is shooting a jet of flame across the corridor, blocking access. At the same time --

IN THE NANOCONTROL MODULE - THE NANOCOMPUTER

displays a line reading **SYSTEM POWER REROUTED FROM ALTERNATE SUPPLY - SYSTEM REBOOTING** --

BY THE HATCH OVER THE NANOCOMPUTER - JOHNNY

finally forces the hatch open manually --

JOHNNY
Come on!

Johnny pulls at Sue, but she won't budge -- she's looking back through the flames and smoke --

SUE
Not without Reed --

Johnny climbs up through the hatch --

JOHNNY
He'll make it back, but we have to go now --

Johnny forcefully pushes her down into the nanochamber -- as --

IN THE NANOCONTROL MODULE - THE COMPUTER

reboots and reactivates with the line **BIO-NANO PROGRAM RUNNING** --

IN THE NANOCHAMBER - THE LASER MESH REACTIVATES

around Sue as she is shoved through by Johnny -- as the laser mesh **swirls around Sue, she is lost in a glowing matrix of light** --

AT THE HATCH - JOHNNY

looks down in horror at his sister's deconstruction -- he instantly dives down into the chamber --

IN THE NANOCHAMBER - JOHNNY'S DIVE PUSHES SUE DOWN

out of the laser mesh and into the ship -- the force of his dive, combined with his weightlessness, causes him to collide against the walls of the nanochamber -- the system **starts another cycle, as Johnny's body is reconstructed by the laser matrix** -- as --

IN THE STATION CORRIDOR - REED

is about to charge through the flame to get to Victor, but another explosion surges a fireball through the corridor. Sure that no one could be alive in there, Reed turns to run back --

-- and just as Reed turns to leave, Victor slowly stumbles out of the smoke and flame, one side of his body charred, his hand held to his face, hiding it from our view -- as --

IN THE PHOENIX - JOHNNY

has pulled himself down and strapped himself in -- he looks up --

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE HATCH - REED

is back, and is looking down at the still-running laser matrix --

-- but the station rocks with another explosion -- there is clearly no choice. Reed dives into the hatch --

IN THE NANOCHAMBER - REED

moves through, the laser matrix running a cycle around his body even as he dives through it --

IN THE PHOENIX - REED

pulls himself in, as Johnny and Ben, both dazed from the laser exposure, do a very quick pre-flight --

REED
Victor's dead.
(he straps in)
We've only got seconds before re-entry --

BEN
(working controls, irritated)
-- What did you do your post-grad work in, Richards? "The Incredibly Obvious"?

Ben seals the docking hatch -- then the ship's hatch -- and --

OUTSIDE THE STATION - THE PHOENIX

drops away as another **blast** tears off another of the docking modules -- the wreckage hurtles toward the ship and collides with it, damaging the outside of the ship --

-- but the thrusters fire and the ship blasts away -- as --

INSIDE THE STATION - AT A PORTHOLE - VICTOR

is wounded, and burned, still clutching his face -- and he can see the tail end of the departing ship, marooning him --

Victor screams with a voice as scarred as his face must be --

VICTOR
-- **noooooooooooo** --

As his scream continues, another BLAST rocks what's left of the station, tilting the corridor -- Victor is thrown from his feet --

-- and starts sliding toward the open hatch, toward the blue glow of the still-running nanochamber --

-- Victor desperately tries to brake himself, but it's hopeless -- he **falls into the nanochamber** alongside loose metal debris from the wreckage of the station --

VIEW OVER NANOCHAMBER - **VICTOR IS IN THE LASER MATRIX**

thrashing in a glowing silhoette -- as --

OUTSIDE - THE STATION

or what's left of it are hurtling toward one corner of the globe --

-- and we can see the Phoenix is bulleting down toward another, sparking as it enters the upper atmosphere --

INSIDE THE PHOENIX

The ship is shaking to pieces, damaged by the last piece of wreckage, forcing Ben and Johnny to struggle with the controls -- what's worse is the ship is clearly getting hotter --

BEN
(shouting over noise)
Our re-entry angle's too steep -- we're gonna cook if we don't level out --

JOHNNY
(on edge of panic)
The heat shield's loose -- what'll we do?

ANGLE ON THE PHOENIX - THE SHIP'S NOSE

is turning white hot with the flawed re-entry -- as --

OUTSIDE THE STATION - THE NANOCHAMBER

is also entering the atmosphere, in a shower of sparks --

INSIDE THE NANOCHAMBER - THE TOP INDICATORS

show that the electricity here has both the bio-nano **and** mechanical nano programs running **simultaneously** --

Victor, rigid, is being crafted into some hybrid of man and machine -- as he struggles against his own rebirth, he SCREAMS --

IN MISSION CONTROL - THE SCREAM

is heard over the radio -- and all inside realize --

FLIGHT CONTROLLER
That's coming from the station --
(horrified)
Obretch is still alive in there --
(grabs radio)
-- Orion Station -- what is your status? --
Orion Station, do you read me --

IN SPACE - **THE STATION ENTERS THE UPPER ATMOSPHERE**

and is surrounded by flames sparking off the now-glowing, white hot exterior -- as --

INSIDE THE NANOCHAMBER - CLOSE ON VICTOR'S HAND

through the ongoing blue laser dance -- there is a metallic, reflective glint as molecules of metal form around his skin --

CLOSE ON THE TOP OF VICTOR'S SKULL

-- more metal is forming in an oddly smooth, oddly fluid sheath around his head -- as the wall mounted intercom blasts on --

FLIGHT CONTROLLER (ON INTERCOM)
-- Orion Station -- what is your status? --

IN MISSION CONTROL - THE FLIGHT CONTROLLER

is hunched over the radio, sweating --

FLIGHT CONTROLLER
-- please ans --

VICTOR (OVER RADIO)
-- You have betrayed me. --

The voice cuts through the room like an ice-cold razor -- it now sounds metallic, and soulless --

INSIDE THE NANOCHAMBER - VICTOR'S NEW METALLIC SHAPE

can only vaguely, fleetingly be seen. The matrix has cut out, and the only light is the uneven, blinding strobing of re-entry flames outside the porthole --

VICTOR
I have been abandoned by Richards -- I have been condemned by the world that sent me --
(beat)
-- and yet I live.
(growing in intensity)
Carnage shall be your reward -- and **damnation** shall be your heritage.
(angry)
Soon, you shall pray to **me** for a final **annihilation** that I will not grant --

IN MISSION CONTROL - THE TECHNICIANS

listen, chilled less by Victor's metallic voice and his malediction, than by the certainty that he's dying --

VICTOR (OVER RADIO)
-- I shall be your **doom** --

The final words echo throughout, until the transmission cuts off --

FLIGHT CONTROLLER
Poor bastard --

MACLEHR
(unmoved)
Yeah -- that's tough talk for a guy who just became part of the ozone layer --
(grabs radio)
-- Come in, Phoenix -- what's your status --

INSIDE PHOENIX - WINDSHIELD POV - **RE-ENTRY FLAMES**

swirl around the nose -- the ship's front is glowing white-hot --

BEN (O.S.)
(clipped, urgent)
-- our heat shield is loosened --

IN PHOENIX COCKPIT - THE HEAT

is roasting everyone inside -- Ben is weakened, but trying to hold it together -- Johnny, oddly, seems less affected by the heat, but he's rattled by the fact that everything's falling apart --

JOHNNY
-- we've lost right engine power -- interior temperature two fifty and climbing --
(losing it)
-- shit -- three hundred --

IN MISSION CONTROL - MACLEHR

crowds behind the flight controller's radio --

JOHNNY (OVER RADIO)
-- four hundred fifty --

With that, radio contact cuts off into loud static. MacLehr turns to the flight controller, disbelieving --

MACLEHR
That's impossible -- they'd already be dead if that were right --

EXTERIOR VIEW OF PHOENIX - IT IS A FIREBALL

streaking into the atmosphere --

INSIDE THE PHOENIX COCKPIT - BEN

is near collapse from heat exhaustion -- Johnny is physically holding up better, but is definitely showing signs of fear --

JOHNNY
(panicked)
-- the ship's breaking up --

BEN
(weakening)
-- quit complaining -- try a barbeque roll --

JOHNNY
-- a barbeque what? --

Ben finds his last reserve of strength -- he turns to Johnny --

BEN
This ain't the kind of trouble you can eject out of, kid --
(seizes controls)
-- even out the fire --

Ben grabs the controls and pulls them hard to the left --

THE PHOENIX SPIRALS DOWN

in a "barbeque roll": a manuever that spreads the fire evenly along the ship by whipping it in a series of 360 degree spirals --

-- but at the same time, it greatly reduces control -- it's corkscrewing through the clouds, hurtling toward the East Coast --

IN MISSION CONTROL - THE TECHNICIANS

scramble to find the ship on their screens -- one finally does --

TECHNICIAN
-- I've found them -- their trajectory is taking them over New York state --

MACLEHR
-- Good -- that's close to the Lieber aircraft testing center. There's a runway there that can take them --

But the flight controller looks intently at a different screen --

FLIGHT CONTROLLER
They're not going to make it that far --
(looks up gravely)
Call out a recovery team. Now.

IN THE PHOENIX - TIGHT ON BEN'S FACE

as he fights to remain conscious and to keep the ship together --

BEN'S POV OUT WINDSHIELD - THE OPAQUE GLASS

has been blackened with soot, smoke and fire: you can't see much, but you can vaguely make out that the view is changing --

OUTER VIEW OF PHOENIX - THE SHIP

is on fire and shaking to pieces, and it's diving straight down directly toward a mountain peak in a wooded area -- there's just a couple of seconds to a one-point landing --

IN THE PHOENIX - BEN

knows it -- he pulls back on the stick with everything he's got --

THE PHOENIX PULLS UP SLIGHTLY

-- just enough for it not to be a full-on dive, just enough for the ship's track to match the downward slope of the mountain --

-- **the ship impacts**, hitting the mountain like a missile -- the momentum carries it as it SMASHES down the mountain slope, leaving behind a blazing trail of broken trees and shattered rocks --

-- **and is heading towards a thousand foot dropoff** --

INSIDE THE COCKPIT - THE IMPACT

throws them around like toys -- Reed holds onto Sue to try to protect her, Johnny just holds on, period, while Ben tries to steer the ship -- uselessly, because --

THE PHOENIX IS SLIDING DOWN THE SLOPE SIDEWAYS

pulverizing rocks and splintering trees in its path -- until the ground becomes uneven -- and the ship flips, snapping off one wing and its engine, rolling end over end --

-- the wing's engine and fuel **explode in a fireball** --

INSIDE THE COCKPIT - THE FIREBALL

surges into the cabin near Johnny as the ship rolls -- but mysteriously, it instantaneously **disappears** on contact -- as --

-- Sue, battered, looks out the window -- on one of the flips, she can see they're one hundred feet away from a cliff --

THE PHOENIX

stops flipping but continues sliding -- it's fifty feet away from the drop and it seems nothing can stop it --

-- but something does -- the ship's momentum abruptly stops, as if it's hit an invisible wall, resting at the edge of the dropoff.

As it comes to a halt, the ship lets loose a metallic GROAN -- and a structral CRACK in the ship's hull opens it up like a melon.

ON THE SLOPE - REED AND SUE

are out of the ship -- unconscious, they lie together in the snow amidst bits of burning wreckage.

At the cockpit, Johnny, half-conscious, pulls himself painfully out of the ship -- with one hand on the hull, we see that, unnoticed by Johnny, heat from his hand is actually melting an imprint in the steel. Johnny finally collapses against a rock --

-- and as the WHOPPING of a trio of helicopters draws closer, Ben tries to pull himself out of the tangled cockpit, but can't -- Ben drops inside it, looking up with his last bit of strength --

BEN'S POV - THE HELICOPTERS LAND

on the slope -- and a response team in biohazard outfits get out, heading over toward the wreck, as Ben and we --

FADE TO BLACK.

UP FROM BLACK - BEN'S POV - A SCREEN OF ARMORED GLASS

shimmers into view as Ben wakes up, opening his eyes to see a literally sterile environment --

BEN

sits up in his bunk, holding an aching head, and looking around -- he's in a quarantine cage. It's 10'x10'x10' of armored plexiglass, magnetically sealed, with cameras and scientific monitors aimed down to record his every move. Not the nicest way to wake up.

Ben, groggy, stands to take in his surroundings: there's a digital **QUARANTINE CLOCK** reading **"36:06:08"**, confirming what Ben's stubble suggests -- he's been there for some time. Ben looks out --

THROUGH THE GLASS - ON THE OTHER SIDE

is more monitoring equipment, manned by a YOUNG TECHNICIAN in a sealed biohazard outfit. The door opens -- and Johnny, also in a biohazard outfit, enters, looking concerned. The technician confers with Johnny for a moment -- we can't hear what's being said, but Johnny's face falls after seeing what's on the clipboard the technician hands him. Ashen, pitying, Johnny looks at

THROUGH THE GLASS BARRIER - BEN

has now fully awakened. Something is very, very wrong.

Ben moves to the glass barrier, and Johnny approaches the other side, nervously pasting on a fake smile. It's the look you get if you have to tell someone they're dying. Johnny hits the intercom --

JOHNNY (THROUGH INTERCOM)
(awkward)
How do you feel, buddy?

BEN
Like a ton of bricks.
(trying for joke)
How about you? You look like someone just repo-ed your Porsche.

JOHNNY (THROUGH INTERCOM)
I'm -- okay. We've been here for just over a day now -- the rest of us have passed the ordinary flight quarantine --

BEN
"The rest of us"?
(impatient)
What's going on, kid? If everyone else has passed Q, what am I still doing in here?

Johnny pauses, trying to figure out how to tell Ben.

JOHNNY (THROUGH INTERCOM)
Something happened up there when we were exposed to the experiment. You were in the chamber longer than any of us.
(upset)
The doctors are still trying to work it out. But -- something up there changed you. On a cellular level. They say you're **mutating.**

Ben is shocked -- and looks down at his body, trying to assess the changes. Nothing looks different -- yet.

BEN
Mutating? Into what?

JOHNNY (THROUGH INTERCOM)
There's no nice way to say it --
(blurts out)
-- you're going to become a -- a monster. And there's nothing they can do to stop it. The doctors have run a computer projection of what you're going to look like --
(looks to clipboard with barely concealed disgust)
-- it's not very pretty.

ON BEN'S FACE

as the world he knows comes to an end. But he finds some resolve.

BEN
Then show me.

JOHNNY (THROUGH INTERCOM)
(hesitant)
Ben, it's the ugliest thing I've ever seen --

BEN
I gotta know.

Johnny nods -- swallows hard -- and starts to turn it around --

JOHNNY (THROUGH INTERCOM)
(sincere)
I -- I just wish I could change it somehow --

CLOSE ON THE GLASS - BEN

moves his face closer to see, his anxious reflection on the glass as the clipboard is turned around to reveal --

BEN'S POV - AN EIGHT BY TEN NASA PUBLICITY PHOTO

of Cmdr. Ben Grimm, awkwardly smiling but very human, posing in a flight suit by an American flag -- Ben's POV shifts up to --

-- Johnny's grinning face.

JOHNNY (THROUGH INTERCOM)
-- nobody, but nobody, should have to go through life looking like that.

TIGHT ON BEN'S FACE

as his fear changes into total rage -- we CUT TO --

AN OUTER HALLWAY - THE YOUNG TECHNICIAN

who let Johnny in is returning -- but when he hears a building-shaking **THOOM**, he runs for the door -- there is another **THOOM** --

OUTSIDE THE QUARANTINE GLASS - BEN CHARGES THE ARMORED GLASS

-- he throws all his weight into it, but to no avail: it quivers and quakes, but it's never going to give.

Johnny is still laughing, as Ben tries to smash through again --

JOHNNY
-- now, what time did you say it was?

BEN (THROUGH INTERCOM)
I said, it's --

Johnny flips off the intercom as Ben angrily, silently runs through an NC-17 string of epithets. With a small wave goodbye, Johnny walks away. A few feet away, the technician stops him --

TECHNICIAN
What are you doing? His quarantine is up -- I thought you were going to let him out.

Johnny affects a tough military pose, and stares the techie down.

JOHNNY
Is that what you "thought" --
(reads nametag)
-- Perkins? Commander Grimm is suffering from an obvious case of post-orbital psychosis --

Unsure, the technician looks over -- and Ben, charging the armored glass again and again like a gorilla, indeed looks crazy.

JOHNNY
(condescending)
-- that you failed to spot.

The technician looks genuinely chagrined. Ben, meanwhile, continues to rythmically **THOOM** against the glass with the same force and sound as a wrecking ball --

JOHNNY
I'm doing you a favor. I won't put you on report -- but --
(alters clipboard)
-- you've got to maintain the Commander's quarantine for eight more hours. Minimum.

Johnny hands the relieved technician the clipboard --

TECHNICIAN
Yes, sir -- thank you, sir --

The techie awkwardly salutes Johnny, then focuses his full scrutiny on Ben. Johnny, flashing a final smirk, heads out --

-- as Ben smashes the glass, shouting silently -- we CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE OF TECHNICAL INNOVATION BIOLAB - DAY - JOHNNY

breezes into the sterile environment. Reed and Sue are there, going over tissue samples on a row of four high-tech microscopes, each wired to a computer, each with a monitor showing **TISSUE SAMPLE MOLECULAR ANALYSIS: B.GRIMM -- ELAPSED TIME 00:31:03:57,** etc. Reed looks haggard -- he's clearly been at this for hours -- and Sue is surprised that Johnny's alone as he flops into a chair.

SUE
I thought you were going to get Ben.

JOHNNY
He's still sleeping. And he looked so darn cute, I just couldn't wake him up.

Reed shoves away from one of the microscopes, perplexed --

REED
Victor's program didn't work. There's no sign of altered cellular structures at all.

SUE
You sound almost disappointed that thing didn't take us apart.

Reed paces around the room --

REED
In a way, I am. The Phoenix, the station -- all the years of research -- Victor's death -- it was all for nothing.
(beat)
Absolutely nothing.

SUE
At least we're alive. And nobody's going to forget that Victor died a hero.

A cloud passes over Reed's face. He obviously hasn't told anyone about what Victor did. And he obviously has no intention to.

JOHNNY
Cheer up, Reed. I still don't know how we walked away from that crash.

MACLEHR (O.S.)
No one does.

MacLehr enters, with a sheaf of photos and data from the crash.

MACLEHR
The flight forensics experts want to talk to you. They've never seen anything like it.
(points to data)
Ship sensors show the fuselage broke clean in half before you even landed. So how did it hold together for another twenty seconds?
(points to more data)
Here's another reason you should all be dead: the internal temperature readings show it was hot enough in there to melt <u>steel</u> --

JOHNNY
-- and my internal boredom readings indicate it's dull enough in here to melt my <u>brain</u>.
(gets out of chair)
If the forensics boys want to talk to me, they can wait. I'll see you two later --

JOHNNY
(heads for door)
-- I'm overdue for a little R&R.

As Johnny walks out, Sue turns to Reed --

SUE
So are we.

Reed looks longingly at the equipment through bloodshot eyes --

REED
But there are still some tests I haven't run -- I need another day --

SUE
I know this is your idea of a vacation -- but it isn't mine.

As Sue takes his arm and drags him off, Reed finally gives in --

REED
(over shoulder, to MacLehr)
Watch the tests. The computer analysis has another thirty-one hours to run --

MACLEHR
Sure, sure -- get some rest, Reed.

As Reed is led out, MacLehr turns his attention to the monitors, which continue the cellular breakdowns -- and we CUT TO --

EXT. **TELLURIDE** - A HELICOPTER SLASHES OVER THE MOUNTAINS

-- but this isn't a military copter -- it's a local heli-skiing outfit, now cresting a snowy ten thousand foot peak -- as --

INSIDE THE COPTER'S CABIN - JOHNNY

is dressed for the cold, and grinning across at FRANKIE RAYE -- a beautiful, athletic woman who has clearly taken a liking to Johnny in spite of his line of bull. Both have their skiis on, and the door is open, but they're not quite to the jumping point yet --

JOHNNY
-- then, Grimm told me I wasn't good enough to fly my F-18 under the bridge at Mach One. It was pretty stupid, but I couldn't take that kind of crack -- so I --

FRANKIE
(cuts him off)
You've been telling me all morning you're the hottest guy alive. Are you ready to prove it?
(off Johnny's grin)
A race down this peak, back to the lodge --

She bends over to give Johnny one hell of a kiss, then stands up --

FRANKIE
-- loser pays room service.

With that, Frankie drops out of the cabin door --

VIEW OF HELICOPTER OVER MOUNTAIN - FRANKIE FALLS FROM THE COPTER

as if she's done this a thousand times, and slices down the powder the instant she lands. She knows every inch of this trail.

IN THE HELICOPTER - JOHNNY

grins, equally fired up by both the race and what will follow -- he moves toward the door to jump out himself --

ON THE MOUNTAIN PEAK - JOHNNY HITS THE SNOW

anxious to start the chase. We note one thing that Johnny hasn't --

-- Johnny has started **smouldering** -- as he skiis down the trail, there is a visible heat vapor trail in his wake.

ON FRANKIE - SWERVING EASILY DOWN A WOODED SLOPE

-- she's well ahead of Johnny --

ON JOHNNY - RACING DOWN AN EXTREME SLOPE

pushing his speed to catch up -- his adrenaline has kicked in now, so much so that he doesn't notice he's getting **hotter and hotter** --

ON FRANKIE - STREAKING DOWN A WELL-WORN PATH

She clearly knows this area well enough that she can glance back at

JOHNNY

who's behind, but catching up -- once off the near-vertical slope, he swerves toward unknown territory that looks like a short cut --

INTO AN ICE TUNNEL - JOHNNY SKIIS THROUGH IT

fearlessly, crouching for full speed -- but as he whizzes past, we see that a backdraft of heat behind him has **melted the ice** that cores the tunnel, and waves of heat track along behind him --

CLOSE ON JOHNNY'S FACE

as he swerves to a straightaway, so caught up in the race that he doesn't notice tiny match-like flames are blooming on his cheeks --

LONG SHOT OF JOHNNY SKIING THROUGH WOODED AREA

Pinpoint flames are bursting out of his clothes, one after the other -- there's a dozen of them and they're multiplying --

-- as he swerves through a maze of trees, he throws off jets of flame that incinerate branches before fizzling out in the snow --

TRACKING SHOT BEHIND FRANKIE - FRANKIE TURNS BACK

to see Johnny -- her grin turns into a look of fear -- because

FRANKIE'S POV - JOHNNY'S BACK AND LEGS ARE COMPLETELY ON FIRE

-- he's shooting down the trail like a rocket sled, past an astonished Frankie who stops in her tracks, as Johnny, still oblivious, still laughing, flashes past her -- until finally --

JOHNNY

executes a perfect halt, a hundred feet down from Frankie -- he turns to look up at her proudly, unaware of what the problem is --

JOHNNY
Come on, Frankie -- if you want to hang around with Johnny Storm, you'd better get used to coming in second --

But Johnny takes in the horrified look on Frankie's face -- he finally looks down and realizes that **he is on fire** -- there are now at least thirty pinpoint flames burning through his clothes. Johnny's momentary look of amused victory turns to one of terror --

-- and before Johnny can react, his body **bursts into a full fireball**, extending a viscous, gaseous flame several feet out --

CLOSE ON FRANKIE'S FACE

Her horror grows as this becomes even more inexplicable --

IN THE CENTER OF THE FIREBALL - JOHNNY IS TERRIFIED

-- but he's in no physical pain whatsoever. Looking like a demon in the blaze, which steadily, evenly flows around him as if it were gas-fed, he stares at his hands -- and there's a reaction to his thought. The flame ripples -- and a second later --

-- **all of the flame surrounding Johnny's body goes out.** The fireball has affected everything around Johnny: ice near him has melted into a moat of slush, branches hanging low over him have been incinerated, and his clothes are now just hanging, charred shreds, but Johnny's body is completely unmarked.

Off Johnny's look of awe -- we CUT TO --

EXT. CONNECTICUT - A COZY WOODED CABIN - PRE-DAWN

In the moments just before sunrise, we PAN AROUND the bedroom, past a sliding glass door that opens to a back deck overlooking the wilderness -- we can't see anyone, but we hear, from outside --

SUE (O.S.)
Reed? You're missing a beautiful sunrise.

As the camera PANS AROUND, we find Reed still in bed, asleep. But what's unusual here is that Reed has slept in a very odd angle -- all of his limbs are splayed and stretched out in impossible angles.

As he starts to come around, his body changes back to normalcy, like a rubber doll returning to its original dimensions.

Reed groggily gets up, noticing nothing except for an odd crick in his neck. With one pop, as he pulls on a bathrobe, he works it out -- and as he moves toward the open door, he stretches, in an ordinary, waking-up sort of way -- but when he does --

-- **his arms stretch out ten feet each**, brushing the limits of the room, then snap back to their proper proportions.

REED

pauses, surprised -- but shrugs it off. That was impossible, and he's still half asleep.

SUE (O.S.)
Oh, Reed, you have to see this. Get out here.

REED
Coming, honey.

Reed, still a bit thrown, moves outside to --

THE DECK

-- and as promised, the sunrise is worth waking up for -- the dawn's poking out through the hills, the trees, and a morning mist that's rising up toward the cabin.

Reed emerges, looking out at it, smiling -- it's a nice sunrise. But something's wrong with this picture:

SUE (O.S.)
Isn't it spectacular?

At Sue's voice, Reed starts -- it was very close, and Sue is nowhere to be seen. Is he dreaming? He looks left, then right --

SUE (O.S.)
(lightly sarcastic)
I know you'd rather be in the lab -- but isn't this sort of nice too?

Reed is startled further when he feels something -- Sue's hand -- brushing against his chest -- he jumps back, away --

SUE (O.S.)
(hurt, mad)
Well, what's your problem?

REED
(confused)
Sue? I hear you -- but -- I don't see you. Where are you?

SUE (O.S.)
I'm right here, Reed --

Reed looks to the source of the voice -- and sees --

SUE'S OUTLINE IN THE MIST

As the morning fog swirls up the deck, it envelops Sue, creating an imperfect outline -- but she is otherwise utterly transparent.

We can vaguely make out enough of her ghostly image to see that she finally realizes what's happened to her -- she looks down and sees that she has vanished. Terrified, she turns to Reed --

SUE
Reed -- ?

Reed quickly moves toward Sue's outline -- but Sue, panicked, freezes, and as Reed comes towards her --

-- a **wave of energy**, invisible except for a prismatic breaking of light at its fringes, **bursts from Sue's body reflexively** -- in the moment that it does, Sue becomes visible again -- the instant the wave subsides, Sue's body snaps back into invisibility --

-- but the force field knocks Reed back across the deck as if he were hit by a wrecking ball -- he flies ten feet toward the other side, and crashes against a wooden railing. When he impacts against the deck, all of his limbs plasticize, stretch and loosen into a tangle -- he looks as if he's made of half-melted rubber.

Reed looks down at his body with both astonishment and clinical interest. As he pulls himself back together, he looks up at --

SUE'S TRANSPARENT FACE

which is visible only from the fog's condensation clinging to it -- as the dawn's sunlight breaks through her body, she asks the question everyone's wondering:

SUE
(frightened)
What's happening to us?

CUT TO:

EXT. NEW YORK SUBURB - YANCY STREET - DAY

A typical, nondescript middle-class street -- this could be anywhere. But today, suburbia is being invaded -- a convoy of <u>six</u> government sedans converge quietly on a corner house.

INSIDE THE HOUSE - A LOUD CLANKING

takes us through -- it's got the simple, Archie Bunker decor you'd expect from Ben, and a television that is perpetually tuned to old movies. Finally we find the source of the rythmic CLANKING --

-- in a back room, we pass some wall-mounted photos of Ben from his college football days -- and find that Ben has set up an exercise room with a home universal weight machine. Ben, in a tank top, is in the middle of a workout, doing reps on the pec deck -- but he isn't even breaking a sweat, even though the machine has the entire double stack of weights pegged.

Ben stops when he hears the doorbell CHIME -- he gets up, and looks at the machine, allowing himself a smile. Apparently he's never been able to lift quite so much before. But as Ben walks away, we see that, unknown to Ben --

-- the skin on Ben's back is covered with leathery, rust-colored blotches. Also unknown to Ben:

OUTSIDE THE HOUSE - A GROUP OF **TACTICAL OPS**

-- fully armed and wearing body armor, are quietly but definitely taking up position around the house.

INSIDE THE HOUSE - AT THE FRONT DOOR

Ben opens the door to see MacLehr, standing there flanked by a couple of tactical ops. Ben eyes the body armor --

BEN
Nice costume. Halloween was last month --
(starts to close door)
-- and I'm off duty.

MacLehr holds the door open -- gently, but firmly.

MACLEHR
I'm sorry, Commander -- but you've got to come back with us. There was a biological anomoly from your exposure to the experiment -- the quarantine's back on.

BEN
(a small laugh)
That's almost as funny as your outfit. Listen, Storm's already pulled that one on me -- so why don't you run along and tell him I never fall for the same gag twice.

Ben closes the door solidly in MacLehr's face -- but the sound of the SLAM is a little <u>too</u> solid --

-- Ben steps away from the door, and sees that the doorjamb is splintered -- and the doorknob has been crushed as if it were made out of wax instead of metal. When he looks down, he sees something else: hair has fallen from his head to the floor.

Ben, surprised by this, backs away from the door -- and as he does, he catches sight of himself in a hallway mirror --

BEN'S POV IN MIRROR

Ben sees that he **<u>is</u>** transforming -- his hair is rapidly falling away from his head, the rust-colored blotching on his skin is spreading rapidly, and where it began on his back, his skin is toughening into something like a rhino's hide.

Ben's face registers his shock -- as he looks down at his body, the transformation accelerates -- and we go --

OUTSIDE THE HOUSE - THE TACTICAL OPS

are mobilizing, not knowing what to expect --

By the street, taking cover behind the cars, a pair of tactical ops load a half-dozen tranquilizer darts into rifles --

TACTICAL OP
(smug)
I hope this guy does feel a little frisky -- any one of these would take out an elephant.

INSIDE THE HOUSE - **BEN IS TRANSFORMING**

and watching his own deformities bloom in the mirror as his skin changes color and toughens into something like armor, building around his body -- Ben's growing expression of revulsion and fear is altered further when the shape of his face and head changes --

-- and Ben looks like he's not just in emotional anguish over the change: the ongoing transformation seems to be physically painful, as if his bones were tearing themselves out of his body to create an exo-skeleton. Grimacing, Ben shoots out an arm, SHATTERING the mirror and the wall behind it -- then he turns to see --

AT THE FRONT DOOR - MACLEHR

is steaming up the glass partition, staring at the whole thing --

OUTSIDE THE HOUSE - MACLEHR

throws himself back, afraid of what Ben's become but excited by what it means -- he turns to the head tactical op --

MACLEHR
He won't come out -- go in and take him!

MacLehr scurries back toward the cars -- the head tactical op waves a couple of men toward the door -- but as they move in --

BEN BURSTS OUT THROUGH THE DOOR

in a shower of splinters and concrete shards -- as he batters the tactical ops aside like toy soldiers in a state of raging adrenalin brought on by the change, Ben turns, looking for

MACLEHR

who has now realized Ben came out for **him** -- he backs away from the first car in the line, to try to put as much distance between him and Ben as possible -- but --

AN ENRAGED BEN CHARGES TOWARD THE SOLDIERS

knocking them aside -- he flips over a car in his path as easily as you or I would toss over a canoe. The soldiers brave enough to hold their ground are tossed aside -- the rest flee, and Ben SLAMS a second car over and away, relentlessly heading towards

A PANICKED MACLEHR

who moves behind the ops with the tranquilizer darts -- the op who was loading earlier isn't quite as cocky now, his mouth agape --

MACLEHR
Fire!

The op pulls it together and raises the rifle -- he fires at --

A RAMPAGING BEN GRIMM

-- the first dart pierces Ben's thick hide -- to **absolutely no effect** -- Ben SMASHES a third car through someone's lawn --

-- a second dart hits Ben -- then a third -- moving up the curb toward MacLehr, Ben is slowed, but not much -- with a wild, groggy swing, he backhands a lightpole, crumpling it like a car antenna --

-- and as Ben staggers within three feet of MacLehr and the tactical op, a fourth dart is fired point-blank into Ben's chest --

-- and Ben finally falls over, unconscious, at MacLehr's feet. The changes to Ben's body are still occurring as we --

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. LIEBER AIRCRAFT TESTING CENTER - UPSTATE NEW YORK - DAY

We get a look at the remote complex of buildings dedicated to testing and building new military aircraft, behind a heavily guarded, high security fence -- as we hear the clinical voice of --

REED (V.O.)
We have now been in total seclusion for fifteen days at the Lieber Aircraft Test Center to determine what's happened. The apparatus for stress tests on prototype aircraft is ideal for our purposes, as is the advanced security of the facility. So far, I've concluded that the molecular restructuring of our bodies took seventy-two hours to fully take effect, and thus eluded our first examination on the cellular level.

INT. TESTING CENTER - DAY - REED

is in the midst of an enormous room crowded of machines -- most of which seem designed for various stress tests on airplane parts. Now, Reed is stretching himself in a fifty foot wide circle, wrapping himself around a group of pillars, again and again --

REED (V.O.)
Each of us sustained severe mutagenic changes to our molecular structure. Our flight suits were molecularly altered as well, allowing us to wear them as we test our new abilities.
(beat)
I have found that I am able to stretch my body into any shape or dimension I wish --

ANOTHER VIEW - REED IS BEING "WOUND"

by the lower half of his body into a rotating group of metal spools that is stretching his body up like a taffy puller, as his torso is completely undisturbed -- so undisturbed that Reed is carefully observing this "winding" while taking notes on it.

REED (V.O.)
-- with no ill effects to my skeletal, muscular or circulatory systems. So far, the only limits to this malleability correlate with my own mental control over my body -- and I am growing more skillful with practice.

IN AN OPTICS BOOTH - SUE

is fully visible and is being bathed in ordinary flourescent lighting, as well as several types of lasers. As she focuses intensely, she very slowly starts to vanish --

-- one layer at a time -- first her skin, then her circulartory system and her muscles, and finally her skeleton -- as we hear --

REED (V.O.)
The changes to Susan's body are even more amazing. She can project a field that bends light around her, rendering her body and even her clothing totally invisible, reflecting no spectrum of light that we've focused upon it.

IN ANOTHER TEST HANGAR - A FUSELAGE

that must weigh over a thousand pounds is hanging thirty feet from a ceiling crane, and Sue is standing back from it, concentrating --

REED (V.O.)
Even stranger is her newly developed mental ability to project at will a force field of energy that can envelop, or lift, objects.

Sue focuses with some difficulty, and creates a force field under the fuselage that slowly, slowly lifts it off its supporting chains. Sue gamely struggles to hold it up as long as she can --

REED (V.O.)
Physically, the effort exhausts Susan -- and so far we have yet to determine her limits. But an early, involuntary manifestation of this ability took place as we crash-landed: she projected a field that held together a crack in the ship, and another that prevented the ship from skidding off a mountain cliff.

As we hear this, Sue's concentration finally folds -- and the field underneath the fuselage drops -- the shock of this causes the fuselage to fall thirty feet to the cleared area below.

LATER - IN A WIND TUNNEL - **JOHNNY IS ENGULFED IN FLAME**

and flying "in place" in the center of the tunnel's full force --

REED (V.O.)
The unique alterations to Johnny's body also had an early manifestation: he is now physically able to absorb incredibly high concentrations of heat. As our ship entered the atmosphere, Johnny's body took in the heat that the shield failed to deflect -- if it hadn't, we'd have been roasted alive.

LATER - IN A TEST CHAMBER - JOHNNY ZIG-ZAGS AT HIGH SPEED

through a half-dozen empty fuselages hanging from ceiling chains, testing his full range of flying motion -- then he rockets directly toward the wall of the chamber, and with several inches to spare, dives into a U-turn to streak back across the chamber --

REED (V.O.)
Johnny is now able to spontaneously burst into a sheath of flame that coats, but does not consume, his body -- and by directing this flame backwards, he is even able to fly at will. Limits have yet to be determined --

IN ANOTHER TEST CHAMBER - AN AIRPLANE JET ENGINE

suspended from ceiling chains fires out its full, flaming exhaust. Johnny, who is not fully on fire himself, has one arm extended in the flame, while his other arm is extended into a small metal box outfitted with a temperature guage, generating its own flame exhaust, as Reed concludes his observations into a tape recorder.

REED
-- I am proceeding with caution.

Reed shuts off the recorder and looks at the equipment. Johnny is completely comfortable -- but the jet exhaust registers as a constant **2,800F**, while the flame shooting out of Johnny's other arm is **2,910F** and climbing: **3,068F -- 3,293F** -- and upward --

REED
This is incredible -- your body is actually amplifying the heat it's taking in.

Reed stretches one arm fifteen feet across to the jet controls, and turns it off, as Johnny withdraws his hand, smiling.

JOHNNY
Come on -- it was just starting to tickle.

REED
We'll have to move slowly on figuring out your limits. Your fire is plasma flame -- the same kind found on the surface of stars.
(beat)
Since your body amplifies heat, there's a danger that you could go nova.

JOHNNY
Cool.

REED
This is no joke, Johnny. At a certain point, your body's temperature acceleration could go out of control, amplifying and re-amplifying until it consumes itself -- and you with it.

At that point, Sue, who is invisible, fades into view between them.

JOHNNY
All right, all right, I'll be careful -- just tell me when I can leave. I'm not gonna spend New Year's Eve in this morgue.

REED
Well -- the molecular restructuring inside our bodies is complete, and contained. Since it's bonded to our individual cellular structure, there's no danger of contagion --
(considers)
-- as long as we maintain control over our powers, there's no reason we can't rejoin ordinary society immediately.

Johnny is about to let loose with a cry of joy, when behind them, we hear a raspy voice that comes from a granite-lined larynx --

BEN (O.S.)
What about me, Richards?

THE THING

enters for our first look at him: his body has now fully, horribly taken on its final form, an orange mosaic of rough, irregularly shaped stone. Under the ledge that's now his brow, the eyes are unmistakably those of Ben Grimm -- and etched on his face is a sardonic sense of humor masking his pain.

BEN
When do I get to rejoin ordinary society?

As Ben loudly crosses the stone floor towards them, the mood in the room dramatically drops -- particularly Reed's. His feelings of guilt over Ben's problem are obvious from his face.

BEN
(sarcastic)
Hey -- I didn't mean to spoil the party.

REED
I'm sorry, Ben. You've taken a worse hit than any of us. But this transformation happened to you through a device I created --

Ben cuts him off with a bitter laugh --

BEN
Trust me, pal. I ain't about to forget that.

REED
-- and I won't rest until I find a way to reverse it.

Ben, unmoved, reaches Reed -- and we see that he's clutching a newspaper in his enormous hand.

BEN
Sure. Sure you will. It don't really matter much anyways -- 'cause I don't think any of us are leaving this zoo for a while.

Ben hands over the newspaper to Reed, as Johnny and Sue crowd in for a look. All three of them are speechless as we see --

THE "USA TODAY" FRONT PAGE

shows color photos of all four of them -- and the banner headline above reads, **NATION MOURNS HEROIC FOUR**, while a sub-head explains: **ASTRONAUTS DIE FROM EXPOSURE TO MYSTERIOUS "COSMIC RAYS"**.

CUT TO:

EXT. MANHATTAN - TIMES SQUARE - DAY - THE JUMBOTRON

in the midst of the ever-crowded area is flashing the message "HAPPY NEW YEAR" -- our VIEW SHIFTS down a side street, finding --

A SKYSCRAPER CONSTRUCTION SITE - LONG SHOT

where, despite the "CLOSED FOR HOLIDAY" sign tacked on the plywood barrier, something is afoot -- as we MOVE CLOSER -- we see --

A SECURITY GUARD

is slumped in a booth, riddled with bullets, dead. Beyond him --

-- four men, who look like construction workers -- except for the machine guns they carry -- get into four personnel cage elevators in the corners of the steel framework. We track their progress in

ONE OF THE ELEVATORS

going up the framework -- each of the four cars, moving in synch, is passing a large, bulbous metal cannister that's being winched up the center of the framework by a crane atop the site. Finally, the elevators and the cannister top a forty story climb --

ON ONE OF THE TOP LEVELS

A helicopter sits waiting on the fringe of the floor, which is completed enough to supply something of a landing pad. In the center of the level, overseeing the raising of the cannister --

MARIUS MORLAK

also known as the leader of the Enclave -- with a nod to the men who've just come up the elevators --

WIDER SHOT - THE CABLE

of each of the four elevators is **blown** simultaneously -- each of the four elevators plummet forty stories to CRASH at the base of the site, and effectively cut off access to the floor --

IN THE CENTER - THE METAL CANNISTER

completes its ascent -- and at this point, we see there is a timer mechanism on the front of it -- it stops dead even with Morlak, who smiles. Everything is going according to plan. He turns to another Enclave member who is aiming a video camera --

MORLAK
Ready?

CUT TO:

INT. MACLEHR'S OFFICE - DAY - MACLEHR

is in an office lined with computer equipment, behind a desk, and on the phone -- but --

-- Reed bursts in, with a pair of tactical ops right behind him -- he stretches his arm across the room and hangs up the phone.

REED
He'll call back.
(stretches paper under MacLehr's nose)
While you're waiting, you can tell me exactly what this means.

MacLehr, nonplussed, eyes the "USA TODAY" front page, held at ten-foot arm's length by Reed, and shrugs --

MACLEHR
"Cosmic rays"? I know it sounds a bit corny, but I was on a tight deadline.
(beat)
You would have liked the ceremony. Grimm's squadron flew a "missing man" formation over Arlington at the end.

REED
You have no right or reason to hold us here. Nothing about our condition is contagious --

MACLEHR
Maybe. Maybe not. But you've been classified as X-level anomalies. And since you used to sit in this chair, you know what that means.
(beat)
You have to be contained until we can comprehend or replicate what's happened. If you can't be contained --

MacLehr shrugs -- the threat is obvious. Reed's face shows his astonishment, as an AIDE of MacLehr's rushes in with a videotape --

MACLEHR
We're going to have many, many opportunities to discuss this later. Now is not the time. The call you interrupted was from the FBI -- they want a threat assessment from OTI.
(to aide)
Is that the tape?

The aide nods, and starts it up in the video equipment mounted on the wall. The tape starts -- and

ON THE VIDEOTAPE - MORLAK

is atop the skyscraper, appearing calm, but determined --

MORLAK (ON TAPE)
This message is for the Governor of New York. I am Marius Morlak, leader of the Enclave.

REED AND MACLEHR

watch the tape --

MACLEHR
Another peace dividend. This nut's a former Department of Defense scientist, but two years ago his job was eliminated.

ON THE VIDEOTAPE - MORLAK

gestures to the bomb, hanging from the girders behind him --

MORLAK (ON TAPE)
Behind me you see a fuel air explosive, packed with three thousand gallons of flammable gas that I will release and ignite in a two-stage explosion two hours from now.
(beat)
The effect? A surging wall of fire that will incinerate a six-block radius -- and an explosive concussion that will, at its center, exceed that of a nuclear bomb. The death toll? As high-rises topple like burning dominos through New York, hundreds of thousands will die. Your options to stop me?
(beat)
Just one. Deliver one hundred million dollars in uncut diamonds, taken from the diamond warehouses of the jewelry district, before my deadline is reached.

Morlak points to a timer on the bomb, which is racing down in hundredth-of-a-second increments -- 118:43:00 -- 118:42:00 -- and downward. Morlak holds up a remote control --

MORLAK (ON TAPE)
If you do as I say, I will deactivate the bomb with this. If you deviate from my demands, I will not hesitate to deliver immediate Armageddon.

MORLAK
(beat)
You may begin counting diamonds, or counting corpses. Which you choose is of no consequence to me.

The videotape cuts to static -- and --

REED AND MACLEHR

seem to have a very different reaction to this -- Reed seems to take this very seriously, while MacLehr is dismissive. Behind them, the aide is holding the phone out --

AIDE
It's the FBI, sir --

MacLehr takes the phone -- and his manner indicates he's pretty happy to be the man in charge.

MACLEHR (INTO PHONE)
Levenger? MacLehr of OTI. I've seen the tape. My scientific assessment?
(beat)
I'd say his cheese has slipped off his cracker. This thing is a hoax.

Reed is floored by this -- his jaw drops a few inches lower than an ordinary man's would --

MACLEHR (INTO PHONE)
FAEs are too tough to make for a guy that far gone. It looks to me like he just hung the back of a cement mixer from the girders. The chances of it being genuine are slim and none. I'd say you should proceed accordingly.

MacLehr hangs up -- and Reed starts protesting --

REED
Building an FAE is child's play for someone with Morlak's background -- and disguising one as a cement mixer is the perfect way to smuggle it into Manhattan --

MACLEHR
(ruffled)
Look -- I've made my call --

REED
The wrong call. If they don't handle him right, midtown's going to be an inferno --

MACLEHR
(cuts him off)
In case you hadn't noticed, Richards, you're not in charge here anymore.

MACLEHR
(motions to tactical ops)
I know you're used to being the top designer at the agency -- but now you're just the top lab rat. Better start adjusting.
(to tactical ops)
Escort Dr. Richards back to his quarters.

The armed ops grab Reed gently but firmly, and steer him out.

CUT TO:

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - THE CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY

A group of FBI agents have the ground covered, and have kept the situation quiet -- but they don't seem to have many options.

ATOP THE SKYSCRAPER - MORLAK

waits patiently, looking over to the bomb's timer -- which is now down to 00:58:13:00 -- 00:58:12:00 --

CUT TO:

INT. HOLDING QUARTERS - DAY - BEN, REED, JOHHNY AND SUE

are in an area that is a cross between a rec room and a detention cell -- a kind of living room built in the center of their seperate quarters. The adjustments made for their comfort only accentuate the fact that this is, unmistakably, a cage.

Ben is seated in a specially constructed steel hydraulic "easy chair" -- and Sue is wistfully staring out a rectangular window on the wall, showing the waves of Chesapeake Bay.

BEN
Suzie -- you've been starin' at the view for two hours. It ain't gonna make you feel any better to make it three.

SUE
You're right, Ben --
(walks away, sighing)
Put it on anything you want.

As she walks away, the "view" changes to Richard Simmons -- then Ricki Lake -- then a hockey game. The "window" is a large flat screen television built into the wall -- and

IN THE CHAIR - BEN

is channel surfing with a steel remote the size of a hardback book, modified for his gigantic fingers. Ben stops when he hits a run of "WHITE HEAT" -- he leans back to enjoy, as behind him --

JOHNNY PACES BACK AND FORTH RESTLESSLY

as a ceiling mounted camera irritatingly tracks with him. Johnny can't take it any more -- he whips a fireball at the camera, turning it into molten slag.

JOHNNY
This sucks.
(looks at "WHITE HEAT")
Look at those guys. They're in prison, but at least they don't have to wear circus outfits.

On screen, Cagney leads the prison break out --

BEN
Now why couldn't we be in that kind of jail? Huff and puff and the wall caves in.

SUE
(dejected)
Keep dreaming, Ben. We're two hundred feet underground -- there's a two foot thick titanium door at the end of the level -- and there are guards everywhere. It's hopeless.

Sue crosses over to Reed, who is lost in thought and just as miserable as the rest of them. But when the movie breaks, Reed's head shoots up -- and his neck twists a little more than an ordinary neck could, at the sound of --

THE TELEVISION - A LOCAL TV REPORTER

is on a remote to cover the New Year's Eve celebration in Times Square, which is already packed with thousands of happy people.

REED AND SUE

stare blankly at the screen, both thinking the same thing --

SUE
They don't even know the bomb is there.
(beat)
Can't the police do anything?

REED
(shakes his head)
They're powerless to stop it.

With that, Reed makes a decision -- one he's been mulling for a while -- and he stretches across to turn off the set.

REED
But we're not.

The others turn to look at him, incredulous --

REED
We're twenty minutes from the city by air. With these abilities -- these powers -- we're the only ones who can stop that catastrophe before it happens.

Johnny and Sue consider this -- but Ben is not interested.

BEN
Just like in the comic books, huh, Richards?
(clicks TV back on)
I don't see how public service has got me anywhere lately. And New York's an eyesore anyways.

Ben turns the Cagney movie back on -- but Reed won't let it go --

REED
Sure. What's the point? If you can't be a part of the normal world, it might as well get blown up, right?

Ben crumples the steel remote like a beer can, and angrily gets up to stand toe to toe with Reed. Ben pokes his finger at Reed's chest, which indents around it like the Pilsbury Dough Boy's --

BEN
In case you forgot -- last time we followed your lead, we got our molecules scrambled.
(another poke)
I don't think I wanna see how you can screw this one up.

REED
(not budging)
Then give up, Grimm.
(hot)
I've spent my whole life locked up in different labs trying to see things no one's ever seen, and do things no one's ever done.
(beat)
I didn't do all that so I could spend the rest of my life at the wrong end of the microscope in this lab.

Reed, now as angry as Ben, forcefully pokes his finger in Ben's chest -- he's too mad to notice it's flattening like rubber against Ben's hide.

REED
You've got two choices, Grimm. Find enough guts to follow me out into the real world --
(another flaccid poke)
-- or let MacLehr chisel pieces off you until you wind up in an "Alien Autopsy" video.
(beat)
What'll it be?

Ben's anger, which has been mounting through Reed's whole harrangue, peaks -- we hear the stone grinding of his right fist clenching -- Ben draws back to strike -- and we CUT TO --

INT. SUBLEVEL SIX CORRIDOR - A STEEL DOOR **FLIES** OUT

ten feet across the corridor to smash the opposite wall -- and

BEN

steps out from the now cleared doorway, blowing the grey paint from the door off his knuckles. Reed, Sue and Johnny step out behind him. Ben turns to Reed --

BEN
Okay, genius -- the first one's on me.
(points to titanium door)
But who's gonna open the big one for us?

Reed just smiles --

REED
MacLehr.

INT. SECURITY CONSOLE - A SURVEILLANCE WORKER

named HAMILTON snaps out of a stupor when he sees something unexpected on the "SUBLEVEL SIX" camera monitor --

ON THE SCREEN - MACLEHR'S FACE

is glaring impatiently up at the lens --

MACLEHR (ON CAMERA)
-- Hamilton? -- Wake up. We've got a problem.

HAMILTON
Yes, sir -- what is it?

MACLEHR (ON CAMERA)
There's a bug in the security matrix for sublevel six. Shut it down.

Hamilton looks at his board -- no problems are evident.

HAMILTON
Uh -- I don't see any problem, sir --

MACLEHR (ON CAMERA)
(impatient)
That is the problem, you idiot -- the malfunctions aren't showing up on the monitors. Shut it down. I'll fix it up there.

Hamilton, chastened, keys it -- we see **"SECURITY SHUTDOWN - SUBLEVEL SIX"** on a monitor. MacLehr remains on camera, glaring.

MACLEHR (ON CAMERA)
Now open the titanium door manually --

ON SUBLEVEL SIX - IN FRONT OF THE CAMERA - "MACLEHR"

is really Reed -- he has, by sheer will, **altered his facial features** to mimic MacLehr's. Ben, Johnny and Sue stand to the side, away from the camera view, in front of the huge door.

REED/MACLEHR
-- I'd like to be able to get off this level.

But the strain of maintaining this facial poses is showing on Reed -- his "MacLehr" face twitches --

IN THE SECURITY CONSOLE - HAMILTON

manually punches in controls -- as his attention is diverted from the security monitor for a moment, we see that Reed's "MacLehr" face is slipping, shifting back into a hybrid of his and Reed's --

ON SUBLEVEL SIX - THE TWO FOOT THICK DOOR

slowly grinds up -- Reed is trying to hold his face together, but the harder he tries, the more his face **warps** --

IN THE SECURITY CONSOLE - HAMILTON FINALLY SEES THE MONITOR

-- and sees Reed's face contorting into impossible, ghastly shapes -- he hits the controls to close the door, and triggers a general alarm --

ON SUBLEVEL SIX - THE DOOR STARTS TO GRIND DOWN

Reed steps away from the camera, trying to regain control of his appearance -- and as an alarm KLAXON starts, Ben steps forward, pulling out the surveillance camera in a shower of sparks --

JOHNNY
I told you if you made that face it might freeze that way.

BEN
And I told you, you can't yak your way through a two foot metal door --

Ben reaches under the edge of the door as it goes down -- it's almost shut, but Ben stops it, straining, and finally, slowly, forces the door back up, inch by inch --

-- as he does, Reed elongates his body -- and snakes into the hole where the security camera once was --

VIEW FROM OTHER SIDE OF DOOR

as it shudders and heaves upward, totally demolished by Ben. Johnny, Ben and Sue, now free, run ahead through the corridor -- they're tracked by ceiling cameras that have gun mounts on them --

IN THE SECURITY CONSOLE - HAMILTON

is frantically rebooting the security system. Right now he sees Johnny, Sue and Ben on monitors with targeting cross-hairs, but he can't stop them -- the system isn't up yet. Just as a monitor announces with a BEEP -- "SYSTEM REBOOTED" --

Hamilton prepares to fire down through the gun camera -- but before he can hit the control --

-- Reed's **elongated arm shoots out of a ceiling vent** and hits the "ESC" key, clearing the whole screen -- Hamilton looks up at --

HAMILTON'S POV - **REED'S ANGRY FACE POURING OUT OF THE VENT**

and glowering down at him -- obviously, Reed's followed the surveillance wiring back to its point of origin --

HAMILTON

is flabbergasted and can't hurl himself out of the control booth fast enough -- as he does, Reed cranes his neck down to look at the monitors and see where the others are going. That done, he zips back into the ceiling -- and we go to --

MACLEHR'S OFFICE - MACLEHR

leaps from his desk as another TACTICAL OP bursts in --

TACTICAL OP
They're heading to level three!

MACLEHR
That's where the experimental aircraft are --
(realizes)
Richards designed half of them -- and Grimm's checked out on them too --
(to op)
Send all your men to that level!

As the op raises his radio -- we go to --

THE TOP LEVEL'S HUGE AIRCRAFT HANGAR

which has rows of planes designed by Reed -- the four haven't arrived yet, but twenty tactical ops run into the hangar, creating a two-row firing formation in front of the elevator -- as they create a picture-perfect firing squad, waiting --

THE ELEVATOR DOOR

chimes -- the door opens --

-- and absolutely nothing happens. There's no noise -- not even a car there -- just an empty shaft.

THE TACTICAL OPS

stare straight ahead, a little thrown. There's nothing for them to shoot. An older op looks to a younger one, clearly a rookie, and motions him ahead to check it out.

The younger op, gun held ahead, nervously steps to the shaft and looks down -- as he does a CRACKLING sound grows LOUDER --

THE OP'S POV - **THE HUMAN TORCH**

blazes up the shaft like a rocket, directly into the op's face --

THE YOUNGER OP

flings himself back from the shaft, his eybrows singed from the heat -- as he jumps back --

-- **the Torch blasts past him and over the heads** of the other ops, most of whom take the only reasonable course of action: they scatter in all directions -- as they do --

JOHNNY

is actually having fun, literally flying rings around some of the fleeing ops -- some fire, but none can get a bead on him as he zips up into the hangar, flying through cylindrical test fuselages hanging from ceiling winches -- until --

-- one of the half-bright ops who's a bit smarter than the rest has uncoiled a fire hose -- as another op turns on the spigot, he aims the hose up at Johnny when he swoops down for a low pass --

-- the blast of water connects, extinguishing Johnny's flame -- he crashes to the concrete, sopping wet and steaming, in a heap.

Stunned, helpless, Johnny starts to get to his feet -- as --

ONE OF THE OPS **TAKES AIM AT JOHNNY**

as he's an easy target -- but as he squeezes the trigger to fire --

-- Sue's **force field barrier forms a sphere around the op** -- the automatic fire from his gun ricochets inside the sphere at the op -- he's saved by his body armor, but he's not enjoying it --

-- as the field is created, Sue becomes visible -- and she's visibly angry -- she BLASTS the force field sphere against a wall with the op still inside it, colliding against the op who turned on the hose, knocking them both out.

Sue turns to Johnny -- a sheepish, steaming mess -- and gives him the withering look that you can only get from your sister --

SUE
Dry off and get up. You've got to keep looking out for me.

ON THE OTHER END OF THE HANGAR - THE LAST REMAINING OP

is scrambling from the hangar -- it's the same one who fired the tranquilizer shots at Ben before. That's important now, because as he runs through the doorway, he ends up nose-to-granite-nose with

THE THING

who, for the first time in this form, grinds his stone features into a smile -- as the op stands there, frozen in terror, Ben raises one hand -- easily cocks back one finger against his thumb for a "flick" -- and the next thing we see --

IN THE HANGAR - **A WINDOW SHATTERS**

as the op flies through it, upside down and backwards, skidding to an unconscious halt a few feet after landing.

Ben rumbles through the concrete toward the plane -- Sue and Johnny are already aboard.

As the op finally stops his slide, Reed's head snakes out of a side vent --

REED
Ben -- quit clowning and get in the plane --

THE EXPERIMENTAL PLANE

is a unique design of Reed's -- it's segmented into four individual sections, with two of the cockpits located on the inner edges of the wings. Johnny and Sue are already strapped into theirs. Ben climbs, with difficulty, into the rear section, which GROANS under his weight: it's not exactly designed for his bulk.

Reed cranes his body over to a set of wall mounted controls --

REED
(shouting over)
Can you handle the pre-flight?

BEN
Can you give a ten minute speech without saying a damn thing? Of course I can --

Ben starts working the controls -- but everything he touches on the control panel seems to bend or break in his too-strong, too-heavy hands. Somehow, Ben manages anyway, and the plane starts a shaky, Harrier-style vertical liftoff, rocking back and forth --

THE HANGAR ROOF DOORS OPEN

revealing nothing but blue skies --

IN THE HANGAR - REED

takes a pair of twenty-foot strides to get into the cockpit of the rolling plane and close the canopy behind him --

IN THE LEAD COCKPIT - REED

pulls himself back to his ordinary shape and takes the controls, oblivious to Ben's difficulties -- he's just intent on getting out.

REED
(grabbing controls)
I'll take over if you don't mind, Ben --

BEN
(uncommonly easygoing)
Uh -- sure --

THE PLANE VERTICALLY RISES OUT OF THE ROOF DOORS

and switches to horizontal thrust -- it BLASTS away -- just as --

-- MacLehr and a group of tactical ops arrive, with bigger weapons than before. MacLehr looks up and keys a radio --

MACLEHR
Mobilize the pursuit choppers. I don't know how or if their minds have been affected, but we can't take any chances --
(beat)
Authorize them to use deadly force.

EXT. TIMES SQUARE - DAY - **THE NEW YEAR'S CROWD**

is already amassing, though it's late afternoon -- the "ball" is hanging from a building, and there's a general party atmosphere in the air as a local television REPORTER has set himself up in a booth to report on the event, with his report being shown on the enormous screen of the nearby Jumbotron --

REPORTER (TO CAMERA)
-- That's right, Jane -- it's only five o'clock, and we estimate there are already ten thousand people in the Times Square area who can't wait to ring in the New Year --

Our view moves away from the festivities -- and back to --

THE SKYSCRAPER CONSTRUCTION PLATFORM - MORLAK

stands in the center of the framework of girders, at ease, clutching the remote activator for the bomb, which creaks in the breeze. An equipment winch is hauling up a large metal box -- and

DOWN BELOW - A GROUP OF FBI AGENTS

who've sent the ransom look up expectantly -- as --

ON THE TOP STORY - MORLAK OPENS THE BOX

-- it is full to the brim with diamonds. Or are they? With a three-lense jeweller's loupe in his eye, Morlak squints at one "gem" --

-- and, irritated, he kicks over the box, scattering the box and the gems to fall forty stories below.

MORLAK
Fakes.
(to one of his men)
But the threat remains quite genuine.

With that, Morlak's men prep the helicopter for an exit -- and Morlak eyes the LED countdown timer, which is now down to **10:00:00:00** -- **09:59:00:00** -- **09:58:00** --

MORLAK
Now that we've proven we're serious, I think we can raise the price to <u>two</u> hundred million when we visit Chicago.

As Morlak and his men prepare to leave in the helicopter --

THE FANTASTIC FOUR ENTER MANHATTAN AIRSPACE

in the experimental aircraft, passing the Statue of Liberty -- Reed is piloting the plane high above the water -- and a pursuit jet helicopter BLASTS into view, tracking behind them --

REED
They're right behind us -- get ready --

All put on headset radios -- all except Ben, that is: his head is too big and he has no earhole to plug into. Frustrated, he crumples the headset into a ball, as the cockpit radios start:

PILOT (OVER RADIO)
Dr. Richards -- this is your final warning -- turn around and fly back to base under my escort, or I will be forced to fire upon you -- please respond --

Reed turns to look at the others -- this is the moment of truth.

REED
This is it -- there's no turning back if we do this. Are you ready?

All answer with a look -- they're behind him.

REED
All right -- remove fail-safe --

Each of them reaches up to unlatch a ceiling switch -- as --

INSIDE THE PURSUIT HELICOPTER - THE GUNNER

turns to the pilot --

GUNNER
They're not responding -- we can't wait for a dogfight over the city --

He flips the safety off the "**HEAT SEEKING MISSILE**" button -- as --

INSIDE THE EXPERIMENTAL AIRCRAFT - THE FOUR WORK THE SWITCHES

on the ceiling console in perfect synch, under Reed's guidance --

REED
Unlatch release switches --

IN THE PURSUIT HELICOPTER - THE GUNNER

hits a button to "ARM MISSILE" -- after a few seconds of machinery warming up, the missile is **armed** --

-- the gunner fires -- the missile **BLASTS** out of its mount --

INSIDE THE EXPERIMENTAL AIRCRAFT

In the same split second that the helicopter fires its missile --

REED
Release now --

All four simultaneously pull the release switches above them -- and as the missile tracks closer --

-- each of the four segments mechanically extends -- a series of explosive bolts fire -- and

THE EXPERIMENTAL AIRCRAFT BLASTS INTO FOUR SEPERATE CRAFTS

that track off in four seperate directions --

IN THE PURSUIT HELICOPTER - THE GUNNER AND THE PILOT

are agape -- this is a first --

THE HEAT-SEEKING MISSILE

tracks right after Johnny's craft, accelerating to catch up --

INSIDE REED'S CRAFT

Reed turns to see where the missile is going --

REED (INTO RADIO)
Johnny -- the missile's right on your tail --

INSIDE JOHNNY'S CRAFT

he enjoys the adrenalin rush of a lifetime -- as the missile nears his plane, he unlatches his safety belt --

JOHNNY (INTO RADIO)
Relax, Reed -- that's the first stage -- now for the second --
(throws open canopy)
-- **flame on**!

Johnny's **body erupts into a geyser of flame** that arcs him out of the cockpit just ahead of --

THE MISSILE'S IMPACT

against the afterburner -- the plane **explodes** in a fireball --

-- and Johnny **streaks out of it**, ahead of the concussion, LAUGHING almost loud enough to be heard over the sound of the blast --

-- turning, he flames toward Manhattan -- and we see that the other planes are already over Manhattan's East Side --

HIGH ANGLE - REED'S PLANE AND SUE'S PLANE

are flying side by side, turning down Broadway to track south toward Times Square, as astonished passersby look up --

REED (OVER RADIO)
Now that we're away, land on that roof.

SUE (OVER RADIO)
But the bomb is in the construction site --

REED (OVER RADIO)
(cuts her off)
That's right. And you're not going to be anywhere near it.

SUE (OVER RADIO)
Reed --

REED (OVER RADIO)
No buts -- I've gotten you into enough trouble for a lifetime already. Now land.

Reluctantly, Sue veers away from Reed -- her plane lands on a roof over Times Square, as Reed tracks toward the Enclave's skyscraper.

DOWN ON THE GROUND - THE TELEVISION REPORTER

gapes up at these mini-Harriers zipping all over midtown --

REPORTER
What the hell --
(to cameraman)
Get this on tape!

The cameraman scrambles to fire up the recorder as, up above, we see one craft flying crookedly --

IN BEN'S CRAFT - BEN

is having more trouble: he's trying to handle his controls as gently as if they were made of spun glass, but he's still breaking everything. Finally, the stick jams, bent in one direction --

BEN'S WINDSHIELD POV - A KAMIKAZE DIVE

is inevitable, hurtling toward the top crane platform of the building under construction -- within seconds it'll crash --

CLOSE ON BEN'S FACE

which shows no fear -- just a mix of irritation and a little embarrassment -- finally --

BEN'S PLANE CRASHES INTO THE PLATFORM

and plows through the giant crane mounted there -- as the plane and the crane become the same tangle of wreckage, Ben crawls out without a scratch -- nothing hurt but his pride. As, below him --

HIGH ANGLE - REED'S PLANE LANDS HORIZONTALLY ON A LOWER LEVEL

-- he's many stories below the Enclave, but only a few above the FBI agents, who look up astonished as --

-- Reed gets out of the vehicle and stretches up the center of the building, snaking in and out of girders in his path -- toward --

THE UPPER LEVEL - THE ENCLAVE

is preparing to leave via helicopter -- and the timer on the bomb races down -- **04:28:00** -- **04:27:00** --

Reed's head stretches up through the center to eyeball the bomb's detonation device -- but as he does --

AN ENCLAVE MEMBER TURNS TOWARD REED

with a machine gun and fires a short point blank burst --

-- Reed turns at the sound, twisting his body, and though his chest is thin and widened, he visibly tenses with fear -- this is probably the first time in his life he's ever been shot at --

-- **twenty bullets hit Reed in the chest** -- but they don't penetrate -- Reed's torso catches them like hard rubber, and flings them back at the Enclave member --

-- the Enclave member is struck by the bullets, not with penetrating force, but enough power to knock him off the girder -- the Enclave member falls to his death, screaming --

-- and from the look on Reed's face, it's a draw as to who was more surprised. As Reed tries to figure out what to do next --

MORLAK

about to board the helicopter with several other Enclave agents, looks down, thunderstruck -- whatever contingencies he'd prepared for, this wasn't one of them. Something else catches his attention -- the WHOPPING of another helicopter, above -- where

ON THE CRANE PLATFORM - BEN

is being shot at by the government pursuit copter -- machine gun bullets stitch around Ben on the platform as the copter circles around. The bullets ZING and SPARK through the steel wreckage -- and the ones that actually hit Ben just skip off his rocky hide -- but Ben seems genuinely annoyed at the attack.

As the copter banks around the building to make another pass, Ben reaches for the thirty-foot, four-ton crane arm --

BEN
Okay -- you wanna play King Kong? --

Ben twists and tears the crane arm loose --

BEN
-- It's **clobbering time.**

ON THE STREET - THE TELEVISION REPORTER AND CAMERAMAN

have focused the video camera on the top level, and whatever he shoots is being fed directly to the Jumbotron set, as it happens --

CAMERAMAN
Jesus -- there's some kind of bomb up there --
(view shifts to Ben)
That thing -- what's it doing?

The reporter looks at the monitor -- his jaw is hanging open --

REPORTER
I think he's pointing to right field --

INSIDE PURSUIT COPTER POV - ON THE TOP CRANE LEVEL - BEN

is doing exactly what the reporter described -- with one hand, he holds the crane arm on his shoulder like a baseball bat, and with the other hand, he's pointing in the famous Babe Ruth pose --

-- as the copter flies closer, Ben takes a batter's stance -- he **swings** --

-- and connects -- the cockpit caves in, the rotors bend in half, and the copter is tossed sideways and out of control, until it SMASHES, roughly but intact, on the roof of an adjacent building --

-- meanwhile -- below Ben --

REED STRETCHES UP FROM THE BOMB CASING

as Morlak prepares to step into his copter, which is now warmed up and lifting off. The timer is now down to **01:38:00** -- **01:37:00** --

REED
It's over, Morlak! Deactivate the bomb!

Morlak looks over at Reed -- this dead-serious guy making demands, and looking like he's made of play-doh -- and he holds out the detonator's remote control at arm's length --

MORLAK
You want to deactivate the bomb?
(he tosses the remote)
Be my guest.

Morlak steps into the copter -- as it takes off of the platform --

THE REMOTE PLUMMETS INTO THE FRAMEWORK OF GIRDERS

-- it hits one, then bounces against another, ping-ponging back and forth -- it seems gone, but --

-- **Reed won't give up** -- with his feet anchored in a knot around a top girder, Reed fires himself down after the remote, stretching into a dozen different directions, his face and arm always just inches behind the remote -- until it is nearly within his grasp --

-- and it **shatters** into a thousand pieces against a steel girder --

THE TIMER

on the bomb casing is now down to **01:00:00** -- **00:59:00** --

IN THE FRAMEWORK OF GIRDERS - REED

snaps back throught the maze, reversing himself through the dozen angles, finally getting back up to the bomb casing.

Reed carefully eyes the timer housing -- he has no tools, but he narrows a fingertip into a Phillips-head screwdriver -- rotating his finger, he takes the screws off the detonator casing -- as --

BELOW REED IN THE FRAMEWORK - **THE HUMAN TORCH**

streaks in through the girders, swerving in and around the tangle of girders -- until he looks over to the right, and sees --

-- the copter WHOPPING away from the skyscraper, clearly escaping.

Johnny **blasts** after the copter in an burst of plasma flame -- as --

REED

gets the timer housing off, and sees that the wires inside of the timer connect to nothing. Reed raps the casing -- it's hollow.

Reed's head shoots up quizzically -- several feet up --

REED
The bomb's a phony --
(puzzling it out)
Then where's the real one?

ON THE STREET - THE TELEVISION CREW

literally doesn't know which way to turn -- the cameraman is trying to focus on the Torch, babbling excitedly --

CAMERAMAN
Holy shit -- that guy's on fire -- he's flying and he's on fire --

But the reporter is looking up in a different direction --

REPORTER
Hey -- how come the ball is dropping now?

UP ABOVE - CLOSE ON THE "HAPPY NEW YEAR" BALL

which is indeed lowering on the wire ahead of schedule: **this** is the bomb, hovering over an unsuspecting crowd -- the ball's activated timer is running down from **00:32:00** -- **00:31:00** --

AT THE CONSTRUCTION SITE - REED

looks over and sees the ball dropping seven hours early -- instantly, he realizes what's happening -- and his look of comprehension changes to one of horror -- because --

-- over on a roof, maybe one hundred yards from the bomb, is Sue.

REED
Oh my God --

ON THE TIMES SQUARE ROOF - SUE

has just been a spectator up to this point, but now she's directly in the middle of things as her radio comes to life --

REED (OVER RADIO)
(fast)
-- Sue -- the bomb isn't in the construction site, it's in the New Year's ball -- and it's going to go off in twenty seconds.
(beat)
You're the only one who can stop it.

Sue's face registers fear -- in her case, by involuntarily flickering into invisibility -- she looks over at

THE BALL

lowering on the wire -- the timer is now under twenty seconds --

ABOVE THE ROOFTOPS - THE ENCLAVE HELICOPTER

is in the midst of a firefight with Johnny -- its escape route over the river is cut off, as Johnny blazes directly in front of the copter, leaving a trail of plasma-fire behind him --

-- The copter swerves to avoid Johnny's trail -- but --

-- Johnny throws a plasma fireball at the copter -- it connects, sticking to the windshield like a wad of napalm --

INSIDE THE HELICOPTER

The pilot is frantically trying to get past Johnny -- but Morlak grabs the controls for a front mounted machine gun --

MORLAK
No -- stay with him --

THE HELICOPTER BANKS AROUND AFTER JOHNNY - THE MACHINE GUN FIRES

down after Johnny, close enough that the bullets **pierce the plasma trail** just behind him -- and to make matters worse --

CLOSE SHOT ON JOHNNY

-- his flame flickers -- he's running out of flame power. As --

AT THE BASE OF THE CONSTRUCTION SITE - THE FBI AGENTS

hear a terrible metallic SCREECHING from above -- like fingernails on a blackboard would be, if your fingernails were made of granite and the blackboard were made of steel -- they look up --

THE AGENTS' POV - **THE THING**

is sliding forty stories down a corner girder with just his bare hands braking him, SPARKING against the metal -- Ben isn't falling, but it's the next best thing -- finally --

-- Ben hits the foundation and creates a ten foot impact crater in the concrete -- without missing a beat, Ben turns to run down the street, leaving potholes and awed stares in his wake -- as --

THE BALL

still moves down the wire -- and the decorative metal sheathing pops off, revealing to all that this is in fact a bomb --

Below, the crowd realizes what's happening -- they look up, and start running and yelling in panic -- as

IN THE STREET - REED

is taking seven-league strides, stretching his legs to thirty feet so he can stilt his way up Broadway through the crowd --

REED (INTO RADIO)
(urgently)
Sue -- concentrate on the ball -- if you can contain it, it'll be harmless --

ON THE ROOF - SUE IS AT THE EDGE

a few hundred feet from the ball -- she knows it's all up to her --

SUE'S POV - BELOW HER

is the bomb, ticking below ten seconds -- and over ten thousand people who will be flash-fried if she fails --

-- the edges of Sue's force-field become visible, forming over the still-moving bomb, which is now down to **00:04:00** -- **00:03:00** --

-- but the field breaks up and fizzles out over the ball --

CLOSE ON REED'S FACE

-- tense, saying nothing -- he can't distract her now --

CLOSE ON SUE'S FACE

She is actually breaking a sweat with the concentration -- she's never had to exert this much control before --

THE ENERGY FIELD

forms again around the bomb -- but it only covers it partially -- the bomb is down to **00:01:00** -- **00:00:00** --

-- and the first stage of the bomb **goes off** -- five hundred feet over the crowd, a golden cloud of flammable gas is hurled out --

-- but one split second later -- Sue's energy field successfully **forms an airtight globe** around the bomb's second stage -- the "igniter" detonates inside the energy field, harmlessly --

ON THE ROOF - SUE

nearly collapses from the effort -- but before she can relax --

REED (OVER RADIO)
Good work, darling -- you've got to hold it in place --

SUE
(weak)
I don't know how long I can --

ON THE STREET - REED

is joined by Ben, who lopes throught the awed, parting crowd --

REED
While the cloud's intact, even a spark could detonate it -- hold on until it dissipates.

Ben looks up -- the cloud hangs within the skyscrapers -- and a few blocks away --

-- the Enclave helicopter is pursuing Johnny directly toward the leading edge of the cloud.

BEN
Okay, genius -- now what?

Reed starts thinking fast -- as --

FRONT ANGLE ON TORCH - JOHNNY

looks over his shoulder -- the helicopter is right behind him, and his flame is weakening. He looks ahead --

JOHNNY'S POV - **THE GAS CLOUD**

is right ahead of him -- if he flies into it, it'll ignite, destroying the buildings -- so --

CLOSE ON TORCH

Johnny does the only thing he can -- he **cuts his flame entirely** --

-- with Olympic poise and suicidal aplomb, Johnny throws his arms out for a spread-eagle **dive directly into the heart of the cloud** --

-- at the same time --

ON THE STREET - BEN

bends down towards the street to pick something up --

BEN
Y'know, Richards, I've wanted to do this since the day I met you --

Ben picks up Reed, who is now tightly packed into a ball -- Reed's reply is strained, because his face is now flattened --

REED
Stop fooling around, Ben -- we haven't one second to lose --

Ben cocks back an arm and hurls Reed upward --

VIEW DOWN FROM BUILDINGS - REED HURTLES UPWARD

-- ten, twenty, thirty stories, approximately the same size and shape as a medicine ball, his flattened face a study of concentration waiting for the right moment -- until --

-- **Reed's body unfurls, widening like a sail between the buildings** -- Reed anchors himself by stretching his arms and legs, tying them off on flagpoles and outcroppings --

-- as his body brakes, Reed uses his new sail-like shape to catch the wind and direct it up into the cloud --

VIEW ON THE CLOUD - IT FANS UPWARD WITH THE BREEZE

-- it's breaking up so that it no longer is at critical mass --

-- as the cloud jets upward --

JOHNNY IS DIVING THROUGH THE CLOUD

which we can see is now up above the buildings --

JOHNNY'S POV - FALLING THROUGH THE CLOUD

-- Reed, stretched out, is beneath him -- and the cloud is visibly jetting above him, no longer in a position to harm the buildings --

LONG SHOT - ON THE ENCLAVE HELICOPTER AND JOHNNY

-- The helicopter flies up to the leading edge of the cloud -- just as Johnny plummets toward the bottom edge of the cloud, over the tops of the skyscrapers -- until --

CLOSE ON JOHNNY'S SMILING FACE

Without yelling -- as a quiet understatement, almost a whisper --

JOHNNY
-- flame on --

AT THE BOTTOM OF THE CLOUD - THE TORCH FLAMES ON

igniting the lower edge of the cloud -- a tremendous sheet of flame travels up backwards to --

THE ENCLAVE HELICOPTER - WINDSHIELD POV OF AN **INFERNO**

coming up fast -- the last thing Morlak sees is the same fiery end he planned for thousands, rushing up towards him --

LONG SHOT - **THE HELICOPTER IS INCINERATED IN THE SHEET OF FIRE**

and the conflagration sets off other scattered traces of the gas, but at this point, it's not harmful: what could have been Hell in New York is now just a fireworks display. Speaking of which --

THE HUMAN TORCH

blazes low over Broadway, SHOUTING and LAUGHING, without a doubt the happiest adrenalin junkie of all time. He's flying just over head level -- and with one hand unflamed, he grabs a cigar from a newsstand shelf as he zips by -- at the same moment --

ON THE TIMES SQUARE ROOF - SUE

is near collapse from the mental effort of containing the detonator -- but before she can pitch over --

REED STRETCHES UP OVER THE LEDGE

-- his feet are on the ground, his torso is twenty stories up. Overcome with relief that Sue's alive, Reed catches her in his arms for an impassioned embrace: his arms loop around her body several times, and he gently lowers her down to --

THE MIDDLE OF BROADWAY - REED AND SUE

draw down to street level, locked in a kiss and totally oblivious to everything else, including the awed crowd gathered around them that's gaping at Ben. Johnny streaks down for a landing feet first, shutting off his flame -- laughing, Johnny shoves the cigar in Ben's mouth and flicks a mini-fireball at the end, igniting it.

Ben draws in the first hit of the cigar as if it were pure oxygen -- as a crowd of reporters and news photographers surge toward the four heroes, off one camera's FLASH, we --

CUT TO:

A NEW YORK POST FRONT PAGE

with a photo of the four on the street -- the full page headline is **"FANTASTIC FOUR HALT MIDTOWN MELTDOWN!"**

CUT TO:

A LOCAL TELEVISION BROADCAST - THE ANCHOR

is reporting over footage of the Fantastic Four in action --

ANCHOR
-- The Phoenix astronauts who the press has dubbed "the Fantastic Four" were in fact physically altered while in space --

Over a shot of MacLehr dodging press as he gets out of a car --

ANCHOR
-- Government spokesmen had no comment about the false cover story that they had been killed after their crash landing.

CUT TO:

INT. LAWYER'S CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY - REED, SUE, BEN AND JOHNNY

are in this well-appointed conference room, with a picture window view of Manhattan, to meet a LAWYER who looks extremely nervous about being around them. He's openly gaping at Ben, who is wearing a Fedora and a suit that is literally bursting at the seams, and is slumped in an oversized couch that GROANS under his weight.

Ben lights a cigar as the lawyer tries to regain his composure, sipping from a glass of water --

LAWYER
Now -- if you could explain to me again what it is you want --

REED
It's simple. I've always wanted to put my scientific gifts to work for the betterment of humanity -- but --

BEN
No doubt about it, rubberneck -- you got modesty to spare.

The lawyer gapes at Ben again as he draws on his cigar -- Ben catches him, and the lawyer abruptly looks away, back to Reed.

REED
-- the only backing I could get for the enormous scientific projects I've envisioned came from the military. Up to now. What's happened to us is clearly an opportunity to help all of mankind -- but on my terms.

As Reed rattles on, the lawyer's eyes drift back towards Ben -- he can't help himself -- but by now Ben is annoyed --

BEN
(sharp)
Is my cigar bothering you, pal?

Startled, the lawyer drops his water glass -- but before it can hit the floor, Reed's arm shoots across the room to catch it, and as the spilled water falls, Sue projects a force field around it --

-- as Reed hands the stunned lawyer the glass, and Sue "pours" the water back into it, Reed keeps talking as if nothing has happened.

REED
-- as I said, I think we have an opportunity -- but we need financing.

LAWYER
Of course -- of course --
(finally snaps out of it)
First, we need to start a corporation -- say, "Fantastic Four Incorporated" -- and with your, uh, talents -- I'm sure financing won't be a problem.

LAWYER
(starts writing)
Next, we'll copyright your original DNA --

Ben tilts his hat down over his eyes and leans back in the couch -- it's going to be a long, long meeting.

CUT TO:

A TELEVISION NEWS REPORT - REED IS AT THE CONSTRUCTION SITE

where the fight occurred earlier. As Reed stretches his arm to point instructions to foremen, we hear --

ANCHOR (V.O.)
-- it was announced today that the Fantastic Four has purchased the top four floors of the very same midtown skyscraper they saved from destruction one month ago. Construction has halted for several weeks for Dr. Reed Richards to oversee the redesign of the building's interior, to accomodate his plans for advanced scientific research.

The footage cuts back to the anchor, behind a desk -- as a graphic in the corner reads **"WARTORN LATVERIA"** --

ANCHOR
In world news: overseas, a speedy, violent coup has taken place in the small Eastern European republic of Latveria. Details are sketchy and borders are closed, but the democratic government apparently has been unseated by a shadowy figure claiming to be the nation's rightful monarch --

CUT TO:

TELEVISION - "DISCOVERY" CHANNEL - REED

is shown walking around his labs, very seriously pointing at incomprehensible, unimaginable machines he's built --

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Tonight, on "Next Step": an in-depth visit with Reed Richards at his New York laboratories to discuss his plans to start the future a little ahead of schedule --

TELEVISION REPORT - "E.T." - REED, SUE, JOHNNY AND BEN

are in a Manhattan office, this one full of drawing easels -- grinning, and standing by the four, are STAN LEE and JACK KIRBY. standing in front of the in-studio projection is MARY HART --

MARY HART (V.O.)
In a heated battle, comic book legends Stan Lee and Jack Kirby have won the right to put out a comic book based on America's newest real-life heroes, the Fantastic Four --

As we hear this, we see Reed shaking hands with Stan, while Jack strikes a match off Ben's chest to light a cigar --

-- finally, our montage ends at --

EXT. **FOUR FREEDOMS PLAZA** - DAY - THE TOP OF THE SKYSCRAPER

is now the most modern, high-tech feature of the Manhattan skyline. Forty-four stories high, it comes to a spectacular point as the design narrows into four gigantic "**4**"s at the top.

We MOVE DOWN the skyscraper to find --

ON THE SIDEWALK - JOHNNY AND BEN

are walking up the street. Ben, in his trenchcoat and hat, is trying not to be noticed and is having no luck at it. Johnny, of course, is in a new Armani suit and is definitely trying to draw attention to himself: a KID trails along behind them, and Johnny signs an 8x10 as he walks. But not with a pen --

-- with a pinpoint flame shooting from a fingertip, he etches his name into the photo. Johnny proudly hands it to the awed kid --

JOHNNY
Here you go, son --

The kid runs off -- and Johnny and Ben walk past a newsstand, which has racks that are equally crowded by two things: news magazines with covers screaming "SHOWDOWN IN LATVERIA", and all sorts of Fantastic Four souvenir items -- t-shirts, comic books, fan magazines, and so on. This irks Johnny --

JOHNNY
Look at all this bootleg stuff -- we don't make a nickel on it --

BEN
(couldn't care less)
You're right, kid -- it's downright criminal.

As the they turn a corner, there is the SOUND of GUNSHOTS and SCREAMS about a block up --

UP THE STREET - PEDESTRIANS ARE STAMPEDING

in a panic -- one of them runs headlong into Ben --

BEN
What's goin' on?

FLEEING CITIZEN
(pointing up street)
Bank robbers -- they've hijacked a couple of Brinks trucks!

The man runs away into the crowd, as Ben looks up the Avenue --

A PAIR OF ARMORED CARS

are about two blocks up, speeding toward them -- other cars pull out of their way as SHOTS are FIRED -- a few cops are on foot behind them, but they can do nothing to stop the cars --

BEN AND JOHNNY

Ben peels off his coat and hat, stripping to the waist --

BEN
Looks like we're on, kid --

JOHNNY
Ah, the police can handle it --
(indicates clothes)
I'm late for the taping, and I just bought this outfit --

BEN
(exasperated)
All right, junior -- I wouldn't want you to get a crease in your skirt --

Ben shoves his coat at Johnny, and steps into the street --

IN THE STREET - THE THING

looks ahead to the speeding armored cars -- all that's between him and the accelerating cars is about a hundred yards of pavement --

IN THE LEAD ARMORED CAR - THE BANK ROBBERS LOOK AHEAD

through the slotted windshield at Ben, standing, waiting --

ROBBER #1
What the hell is <u>that</u>?

ROBBER #2
It's the <u>Thing</u> -- run him down --

THE LEAD ARMORED CAR ACCELERATES

-- it's four tons of steel moving at fifty miles an hour -- the coming impact has got to hurt even the Thing -- but --

BEN STANDS HIS GROUND

undisturbed -- he just makes a fist -- rears back his arm --

-- and slams his fist down onto the pavement -- the **shockwave from the blow moves in a roll of rubble, up the street -- until --**

THE ARMORED CAR IS KNOCKED ON ITS SIDE BY A THREE FOOT WAVE

of rubble -- it crashes and skids to a halt on the pavement --

ON THE STREET - THE CROWD

starts to CHEER the Thing -- and that's the last straw for Johnny. He drops Ben's coat and hat, and steps away from the pedestrians --

JOHNNY
(one last look at suit)
This wasn't my color anyway --
(yells)
-- Flame on!

With that, Johnny ignites -- and about $4,000 worth of clothes go up in an explosion of plasma flame as he streaks down the street --

IN THE STREET - BEN

is just starting to get up from the pavement -- but the Human Torch rockets by him, knocking Ben off balance and on his ass --

-- as the Torch flies over the toppled armored car, he flings down a pair of fireballs, instantly spot-welding the door shut --

HIGH ANGLE ON THE OTHER ARMORED CAR

wants no part of this fight -- it pulls a fast U-turn to try to escape -- but before it can get too far --

-- the Human Torch streaks over, tracking with the car about thirty feet up -- the Torch dives down --

ANGLE FOLLOWING TORCH

-- flying in a circle around the armored car, the Torch lobs four fireballs at each of the car's tires --

-- the fireballs instantly melt the rubber -- and the car's rims GRIND it to a halt on the street.

The Torch pitches two more fireballs that seal the armored car's doors shut -- and with the thieves now immobilized and helpless, a group of policemen advance, their guns out, to finish the job.

ON THE STREET - THE CROWD CHEERS THE TORCH

as he flies off -- and the Torch salutes the crowd with a wave and a double loop, leaving behind --

THE THING

who is still on his ass where Johnny dumped him, now forgotten by the crowd. As the CHEERS get louder and the Torch streaks out of sight, Ben rolls his eyes in exasperation, and we --

CUT TO:

A TELEVISION SCREEN - OVER A STUDIO AUDIENCE - **JOHNNY**

is flying rings over and around a gasping studio audience -- after flying around it twice, Johnny flames off for a showy landing on --

A SOUNDSTAGE - DAVID LETTERMAN

is waiting, impressed -- the band is playing "Hot Blooded", the audience is APPLAUDING like crazy, and Johnny grins, as at ease with his celebrity as your average rock star.

JOHNNY
Everybody always complains about how cold it is in here --
(turns to audience)
-- you guys think I ought to turn up the heat a little more?

Amid wild, out of control CHEERING, Johnny flames on and flies a victory lap above the audience -- as we go to --

INT. A DINGY YANCY STREET BAR - BEN

is in his traditional hat and trenchcoat, sitting at the end of the virtually empty bar, with a beer mug in front of him, stonily looking up at the TV hanging in the ceiling's corner --

Down at the other end of the bar, a BARTENDER delivers a sotto voce warning to a MAN in a "Yancy Street Gang" bowling shirt --

BARTENDER
Better hang back. He's in a bad mood tonight.

THE LETTERMAN SHOW - JOHNNY AND LETTERMAN

are now seated -- Letterman starts counting on his fingers --

LETTERMAN
-- so, let me get this Fantastic Four deal straight. There's you, the Human Torch -- there's your sister, the Invisible Woman --
("can't remember")
-- there's -- uh -- Captain Stretchy --

JOHNNY
-- Mister Fantastic. I think that should have been my name, but tell that to the Post --

LETTERMAN
-- and -- uh -- the other one --
(snaps fingers to remember)
-- Agent Orange -- you know, the big monkey you hang out with --

The SOUND of abruptly broken glass takes us out of the show --

AT THE BAR - BEN

has inadvertantly crushed the beer mug -- powdered glass granules run out of his hand as the show wears on --

JOHNNY (ON TV)
I can't believe you called him that. You're going to get a lot of mail from your monkey audience on that one.

ON THE LETTERMAN SHOW - JOHNNY AND LETTERMAN

pause as the audience has a big laugh at Ben's expense --

LETTERMAN
So, he's called The Thing, right? Now, is he a mascot, or -- ?

JOHNNY
Be fair, Dave. He's a big part of the team. He's not the brightest guy in the world, but he's so damn handsome we figured he'd be good for the team's image.

Over more audience LAUGHTER -- we go back to --

THE YANCY STREET BAR - BEN IS STALKING OUT

-- with each step, glasses and bottles in the racks RATTLE --

LETTERMAN (ON TV)
Enough about rock-boy -- I understand that on the way over to the program, you actually stopped a bank robbery single-handedly --

JOHNNY (ON TV)
That's right, Dave --

ON THE STREET - A TAXI

is nearing -- on the curb, Ben raises his arm and growls --

BEN
Taxi!

The taxi slows down as it grows closer -- but when the DRIVER sees Ben, he abruptly floors the accelerator and takes off --

-- spraying a puddle all over Ben. Ben takes this stoically -- and starts a long, long walk toward the skyscrapers of New York.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FOUR FREEDOMS PLAZA - IN THE BOTTOM COURTYARD - MORNING

Two BOYS are in front of the entrance, in the middle of a heated trading card swap -- as with every one of these trades that's ever taken place, one kid has a much better hand than the other.

KID #1
Okay, I'll give you two Things for a Torch --

KID #2
(smugly)
So sorry, my friend. I guess you didn't hear the Thing market has crashed. Today's going rate is three Things for one Torch --

Before this can continue, a dark shadow passes over the kids, and there is the rythmic thudding of Ben's walk nearing. The kids look up, see Ben, and run for their lives --

Ben had to have heard this, but he unswervingly moves on --

CLOSE ON BEN'S FACE

which is as blank and unreadable as it is determined -- as he walks into the lobby -- we cut ahead to

INT. AN ELEVATOR DOOR OPENS - BEN

looks out the door -- he has arrived at --

THE FOUR FREEDOMS PLAZA GARAGE - **JOHNNY'S 1962 PORSCHE**

is sitting in a space under a metal plate that reads "RESERVED FOR JOHNATHAN STORM". The car is cherry red and is perfectly, meticulously restored -- even in garage light, the paint gleams --

CLOSE ON BEN'S FACE

as his equally gleaming smile GRINDS across his face -- we GO TO --

INT. JOHNNY'S APARTMENT - DAY - THE LIVING ROOM

sports the sort of bachelor flash you'd expect from Johnny: a lot of overdesigned electronics and furniture fill the place. Right now, Johnny is smugly sitting back in a couch, a phone in one hand, the other doodling a flaming dollar sign in the air --

JOHNNY
-- Well, they saw the show, right? Letterman's already asked me back, and I'm hosting "Saturday Night Live" next week --
(beat)
-- Tell those guys that if they want me to skywrite "Diet Coke" over the Super Bowl crowd, they've got to step up to the price --

IN THE HALLWAY - LOW ANGLE ON BEN'S FEET

as he walks, THOOMING, through the hallway --

IN JOHNNY'S APARTMENT - JOHNNY

has his hand over one ear, annoyed by the approaching THOOMING sound of Ben walking down the hall --

JOHNNY
What? I can't hear you -- hold on a second --
(puts phone down, shouts)
You want to keep it down out there, please?

The stomping stops. The hall is silent. Johnny picks up the phone.

JOHNNY
Sorry about that. It's like bunking with a Tyrannosaurus Rex here --

JOHNNY
(beat)
-- No -- the Vegas deal has to guarantee I get thirty percent of the --

In mid-demand, Johnny is cut off by a deafening metallic CRASH right outside his door. Johnny, furious, tosses the phone away --

JOHNNY
Okay -- that tears it --

Johnny stalks over to the door and throws it open -- revealing

THE CRUSHED PORSCHE

is sitting in front of the door -- it has been folded into a perfect two foot by two foot by two foot cube, with the metal "RESERVED FOR JOHNATHAN STORM" sign neatly mashed onto the top.

CLOSE ON JOHNNY'S REDDENING FACE

-- as fury turns to fire --

FOLLOWING THE TORCH - JOHNNY FLIES THROUGH THE HALLS

of the Four Freedoms complex, passing biolabs, chemical labs, and bizarre rooms stuffed with inexplicable machinery designed by Reed -- outside a "Worldwatch" media room --

-- an enormous sound of metal CLANKING leads him toward --

THE FOUR FREEDOMS GYM - A NONCHALANT BEN

is in the middle of a gigantic exercise machine that is as big as an entire Gold's gym: it is an odd but formidable collection of gears and weights. Ben is calmly working though some pec reps --

-- when a **fireball** singes through one of the cables, and the tension releases with an explosive **BANG** --

-- and Johnny, furious, flies into view.

JOHNNY
You want a workout, ugly? Let's go --

BEN
You been askin' for it all week, Flame Brain, and I'm just too big-hearted not to give ya a double helping --

Ben calmly gets out of the machine, completely unruffled -- as --

ELSEWHERE IN THE COMPLEX - REED AND SUE'S BEDROOM

Muffled BANGS and THUDS awaken Reed first, then Sue --

SUE
(groggy)
What's -- happening?

REED
(peeved)
What else --

BACK IN THE GYM - JOHNNY

is literally flying rings around Ben, **hurling** fireballs at Ben -- they don't really hurt him, but he has to shake off the napalm-like goo. Johnny is flying just out of Ben's reach --

-- until Ben stretches out both arms -- and brings his hands together for a powerful, thunderous **clap** --

-- the **shockwave** from the clap knocks Johnny off-balance and against a wall. Dazed, Johnny's flame goes out as he falls onto a throw rug -- as Ben advances on him, we go back to --

REED AND SUE'S BEDROOM

-- where the horrible THUDS have only gotten worse --

SUE
(still sleepy)
Aren't you going to stop them?

REED
No --

He stretches across the room to get another pillow, and pulls it over his head --

REED
Maybe, if we're lucky, this time they really will kill each other --

BACK IN THE GYM - A LAUGHING BEN

has rolled up Johnny in the carpet like a burrito --

BEN
Here you go, hot-shot -- test-pilot this --

Ben throws the carpet through the window like a dart --

OUTSIDE THE FOUR FREEDOMS BUILDING - JOHNNY **REIGNITES**

his flame, **burning through the carpet** -- it **explodes** off of him -- and now madder than ever, he turns and flies back in the window --

INSIDE THE GYM - JOHNNY AND BEN FACE OFF

-- with Johnny flying around Ben, flinging down fireballs -- this is a fight that won't be resolved soon, maybe not ever --

-- so we back out away from the fight, and out of the room -- and pass the television in the "Worldwatch" room --

ON TELEVISION - A CNN NEWS REPORTER IN THE FIELD

is somewhere in rural Eastern Europe --

REPORTER
-- tensions are escalating, but we don't have much information. All we know is that Latveria's ruler, a reclusive dictator known as Doctor Doom, has issued an ultimatum to other nations on its border: that they must surrender control of their governments to him, or face total destruction. NATO refuses to confirm reports that they're responding to this by having a squad of F-18s fly over Latveria to destroy military installations. The most striking thing about this standoff is the total vacuum of information. Borders are closed, and there is no communication --
(at a loss for words)
-- yet, there are bizarre, impossible rumors of repression on a level never imagined --

CUT TO:

EXT. LATVERIA - DOOMSTADT TOWN SQUARE - DAY

This town square of Doomstadt looks like any travel brochure photo of a European village built in the sixteenth century -- it is quaint, inviting, and peaceful. Very peaceful. Too peaceful.

The citizens go about their business quietly, but with a unreality to their silence: they are afraid to speak, their defeated eyes glued to the ground. The reason why flies overhead --

A HOVERING ROBOT SPY

with a roving camera mounted in its belly flies fifteen feet overhead, silently monitoring the town.

The citizens of Doomstadt freeze in fear -- one OLD LATVERIAN MAN drops a newspaper, which starts to blow down the street. Apparently, the littering laws have changed, because --

--the flying camera ominously PAUSES, hovering ten feet over the man, with a blinking green light that turns to red. Terrified, the man runs after the paper and picks it up --

-- and the flying robot, satisfied, has its red light turn back to green -- it flies out of sight as the man SIGHS in relief.

Watching this in disgust is a YOUNG LATVERIAN MAN, maybe twenty, who pulls away from his GIRLFRIEND, and leaps on a scaffolding --

LATVERIAN MAN
(angry, loudly)
How long can we live like this? Under the rule of a tyrant? Afraid to look up or speak?

No one will look at him. The nervous crowd pretends that he doesn't exist. But the young man only gets madder --

LATVERIAN MAN
Do you remember what life was like before the arrival of "Lord Doom"?

The robot spy flies back toward the square -- and one CITIZEN, noticing this, speaks up loudly, playing to the camera --

CITIZEN
Yes! We remember! Lord Doom has ended starvation, homelessness, poverty --

LATVERIAN MAN
-- and liberty!

The robot spy hovers over the young man -- it's green light turning to red -- the young man knows he's dead, but won't quit --

LATVERIAN MAN
Listen to me! I only have a moment left! Alone, we can do nothing! But if the rest of you stand together, he can be defeated!

CLOSE ON THE ROBOT SPY

as the camera in its belly rotates up -- revealing a short barrelled **laser weapon**, which begins to HUM --

The young Latverian man looks up at it defiantly --

LATVERIAN MAN
Go ahead! Kill me! There will be a hundred after me! A thousand --

The robot's laser weapon **fires** an intense, conical beam --

ON THE CROWD - THE OLD MAN

who was "littering" grabs the young woman, and turns her eyes away from the sight -- there is a BLINDING FLASH -- and --

WIDER VIEW ON TOWN SQUARE - A CIRCULAR SMEAR OF DARKENED ASH

is all that's left where the young man stood. The old man leads the young woman away, weeping -- and the citizens, terrified, try to pretend nothing's happened, encouraged by the calm, mechanized, pre-recorded voice of Doom, broadcast by the robot --

DOOM (FROM ROBOT)
Privleged subjects of Doomstadt -- you may continue your daily lives in peace and without fear. The threat to your freedom has been neutralized by your servant -- your protector -- your **sovereign** -- Lord Doom.

CUT TO:

EXT. OUTER LATVERIA - DAY - A FIGHTER SQUADRON STREAKS

over the mountains surrounding the nation. We follow four F-18s --

GROUP LEADER (OVER RADIO)
Squadron leader Tango Bravo -- we are three minutes from target. Arm missiles -- over --

INSIDE ONE OF THE PLANES - A GUNNER

runs through the failsafes in preparation to fire a missile -- as -- not too far away in fighter jet terms --

EXT. **CASTLE DOOM** - DAY

Outside, the castle, situated on a mountain, is as nightmarish as anything found in Grimm's Fairy Tales -- but

INSIDE THE CASTLE - THE THRONE ROOM

is closer to Jane's Defense Weekly. There is a mix of opulant, regal European splendor, and machinery as alien and unfathomable to us as if it had come from the twenty-fifth century.

In the center of the room -- a throne, atop a dozen foot pyramid of gold and velvet, surrounded by a virtual electronic cocoon of video monitors and computer screens. A darkened figure sits there, deep in thought -- before we can see him clearly --

A PAIR OF OAKEN DOORS

fly open -- and a worried aide, HAUPTMANN, runs in.

HAUPTMANN
(breathless)
My liege! Our perimeter radar shows that a group of fighter planes are --

DOOM (O.S.)
Silence.

The word reverberates throughout the room -- the soulless, pitiless voice is now modulated into something that is half-human, half-machine. We still can't see him clearly -- our view is with Hauptmann, who freezes at Doom's command.

DOOM
I am aware of their pathetic advance. They may as well attack me with catapults and broadswords. My automated defenses will deal with them as the insects they are.
(beat)
As I shall deal with <u>you</u> if you interrupt me again so casually.

Hauptmann, knowing this is no idle threat, bows in apology -- as --

VIEW FROM MOUNTAIN PEAK - THE F-18S STREAK OVERHEAD

-- but as they do -- a rack of four ground to air missiles of an unusual design swivel in synch with the planes and **launch** --

INSIDE THE SQUADRON LEADER'S PLANE - THE INSTRUMENT PANEL

shows the launch of the missiles --

GROUP LEADER (OVER RADIO)
Four G-to-A bogies fired from south --
scatter and fire countermeasures --

HIGH SHOT - THE FOUR PLANES SCATTER

and drop phosphorus charges, to throw off what would ordinarily be heat seeking missiles -- inside the planes, the pilots' CHATTER is tense but not too worried: this is what they're trained for. But --

-- **each missile bullets through the countermeasures** and unerringly pursues a plane -- each is overtaking their target plane --

Amid more slightly frantic crosstalk from pilots --

INSIDE ONE PLANE - A PILOT

looks back and sees the missile directly on his tail --

PILOT (OVER RADIO)
Bogey is on my six and climbing, Tango
Bravo -- trying to evade --

The missile is clearly catching up -- but it comes up to the plane and **passes the canopy** -- the pilot is sure he's dead --

PILOT (OVER RADIO)
-- no good, it's on me --

The missile **detonates ahead of the plane**, throwing out a thick gaseous cloud that the jet blazes through --

HIGH ANGLE - **ALL OF THE MISSILES**

do the same thing -- overtake their target plane and detonate in what appears to be an anticlimactic cloud of smoke --

INSIDE THE SQUADRON LEADER'S PLANE

The radio CHATTER is now stunned laughter and relief that the missiles turned out to be duds -- the squad leader banks around --

GROUP LEADER (OVER RADIO)
(gung-ho)
Looks like the doctor sent up some fireworks
to greet us. If that's the best he's got,
let's return the favor and go home --

Over a lot of radio CHEERING --

THE PLANES BANK AROUND

back into attack formation, and it looks like these guys are going to get to paint a castle on the sides of their planes -- but --

INSIDE ONE OF THE PLANES - VIEW OUT CANOPY WINDSHIELD

Something is happening to the glass, where it came into contact with the soot -- the glass is being **eaten away**, as if by an invisible acid, layer by molecular layer --

The pilot sees what's going on -- but before he can even realize he's in trouble, the weakening glass shatters --

-- and Mach Two wind pins the pilot against his seat -- as the plane goes out of control, all he can move is his terrified eyes --

PILOT POV - THE PLANE'S INSTRUMENT PANELS

are being rapidly, incrementally **erased from existance** at the molecular level --

THE OUT-OF-CONTROL PLANE SPIRALS

into a mountain peak, **exploding** -- as --

HIGH SHOT OF TWO OTHER PLANES

The **same thing is happening** -- where the nano-payload struck, it is **molecularly disassembling** the planes --

-- The left wing of one plane looks as if it's made of jigsaw pieces that are vanishing --

PILOT (OVER RADIO)
(terrified, incredulous)
-- Jesus Christ -- the wing is melting --

With that, what's left of the wing snaps off at it's weak point, causing the jet to flip over, colliding with the jet nearest him --

-- **both planes tangle and explode in a somersaulting shower of wreckage** -- as --

IN THE SQUADRON LEADER'S PLANE - THE LEADER

can't believe what he sees -- the same silent disintegration streaks across with amazing speed -- both wings are ready to go. The leader looks at his control panel, but that is being dissassembled too -- he strains to reach the "EJECT" lever -- as --

BOTH OF THE WINGS SHEAR OFF SIMULTANEOUSLY

and the plane's fuselage spirals down like a unaimed missile toward a granite peak -- the ejection seat rockets out a split second before the fuselage impacts against the mountainside --

-- incredibly, the squad leader has safely ejected at the right angle: the seat, smoking from the ejection rocket, tumbles until the chute billows open, jerking him to a halt --

CLOSE ON THE LEADER DANGLING FROM THE PARACHUTE

He seems comparitively safe -- but he looks down -- and sees --

THE PLANE'S SEAT

is disintegrating under nano-assault -- everything that's inorganic is being attacked, including the pilot's sleeve -- above him, the chute's straps and the chute itself fall apart --

-- the chair finally collapses -- the leader falls to his death, SCREAMING -- as the last of the chute and chair tumble after him, they dissolve into nothingness in mid-fall -- we MOVE BACK to --

THE MOUNTAIN LEDGE - THE RACK OF MISSILES

that fired at the planes has reloaded -- the launcher, through use of nanotech, has just finished manufacturing new missiles. As --

INSIDE CASTLE DOOM - OVERLOOKING A BATTLEMENT VIEW

We are behind Doom -- we see he has been watching this with slight remorse, as plumes of smoke rise over the distant mountains.

DOOM
So unnecessary. These infants have far to go.

With that, we MOVE AROUND for our first full look at

DOCTOR DOOM

His gleaming silver armor isn't the Tin Man outfit of the early comics. It's more streamlined, with endless alien features: what Samurai armor would look like if H.R. Giger designed it. Even stranger: the armor is more than a mere shell. We see from light, molecular **rippling** that it is fluid enough to reform and alter itself at his mental command. Only the insane, ravaged eyes behind the mask tell us a man is at the core of this thing.

DOOM
The time has come to lead them into the new millenium.
(beat)
The time has come for the entire world to look upon the face of Doom.

CUT TO:

INT. FOUR FREEDOMS LABORATORIES MAIN CHAMBER - CLOSE ON REED'S FACE

which is behind protective goggles and is sporting a headset radio -- he's staring intently at an exposed electronic panel --

-- we PULL BACK to find that Reed's neck is stretched twenty feet across the room, into a booth that is similar in design to the "nanochamber". Most of the rest of him is standing, for balance, some feet away -- one arm stretches across this room to a console, tapping adjustments for the nanochamber into one keyboard. The monitors above it are running data from the Orion accident --

-- We FOLLOW his other arm out -- it is stretched entirely out into another room and around a corner, at least fifty feet, into another lab where a shred of metal is in a glass testing case. Here, Reed's hand is typing with the fingers stretched enough to cover the entire keyboard. On a monitor here, we see test results start to scroll up -- **"SPECTROGRAPHIC AND CHEMICAL ANALYSIS"** --

BACK AT THE BOOTH - CLOSE ON REED

as he hears the results in a synthesized voice via the headset radio -- and we hear what he hears: the computer voice, as well as a low, indistinct background noise making it hard to hear --

COMPUTER (OVER RADIO)
Spectrographic and chemical analysis of aircraft fragment continuing. Negative for acids or corrosives.

REED (INTO RADIO)
There's interference -- please repeat --

Suddenly, a hand lashes into view to yanks the headset off Reed --

-- with his concentration broken, Reed's entire body snaps back to the center like a bunch of rubber bands -- he whips his head around like a cobra's -- to see --

SUE

is standing there -- she's in a stunning dress, but she's angry and hurt, clutching the radio in her hand.

SUE
I said, I've been waiting for two hours.
(off Reed's blank look)
At Bloomingdales.
(Reed is still lost)
To register our pattern.
(he hasn't caught up yet)
It's something that people who intend to get married do.

Reed twists his neck to a wall clock, realizing he's screwed up.

REED
I'm sorry, honey. It's just that I've been reconstructing data from the accident to find a way to reverse Ben's condition, and --
(points to other lab)
-- earlier today, the military asked me to analyze the remnants of a fighter plane shot down over Latveria. It seems to be a weapon nobody's ever seen before --

Sue's face frosts over with a look that says: that's your excuse?

SUE
(icy, but hurt)
Well. How could I compete?
(hands him radio)
Here. Tell it you've dealt with the "interference".

Sue turns to walk out. Reed starts after her --

REED
Sue -- please -- wait a --

-- but Reed is abruptly swatted backwards by a force field thrown back by Sue, who doesn't even break her stride. Reed is tangled at the room's other end, as Sue reaches an elevator.

Ben is getting off, and is surprised when Sue angrily shoves past him without a word, shutting the door --

BEN
Top of the morning to you too --

ON STREET LEVEL IN FRONT OF FOUR FREEDOMS' LOBBY - SUE

pushes out the door, past pedestrians who don't notice anything unusual -- not yet, anyway: something makes a BYSTANDER look up --

BYSTANDER'S POV - **THE SOLE OF REED'S BOOT**

is coming directly down, with forty stories of leg above it --

THE STARTLED BYSTANDER HURLS HIMSELF BACK

as Reed's foot touches down -- and the rest of Reed follows, to immediately reform in ordinary proportions. The bystanders are shocked, but Reed thinks nothing of this -- he's just intent on catching up to Sue. He catches up to her, but she won't stop --

REED
Come on, Sue -- I said I'm sorry --

SUE
Guess what? Today's the second anniversary of your first postponement of our wedding.
(acid)
I understand you're a very busy guy, and I know making new excuses to put it off punches a big hole out of your schedule, so I'll tell you what -- you don't need to bother any more.

REED
(surprised)
What are you saying?

SUE
(angry)
That I'd like to have a life outside the lab. That I'm getting tired of waiting for you. That I'm running out of reasons to not take that job at Johns Hopkins. And that if you keep taking me for granted, I'm going to vanish for good --

Without stopping, Sue fades into invisibility, disappearing into a crowd that parts as an unseen force shoves through --

-- leaving behind Reed, realizing he's blown it. A moment later --

INT. FOUR FREEDOMS LAB - TIGHT ON BEN'S ANGRY FACE

as he looks down at a screen -- over his shoulder, we see a dejected Reed slinking in. Reed looks up to see Ben --

REED
Ben -- ?

Suddenly, Ben whirls around, furious --

BEN
You lying son of a bitch -- you did this to me on purpose --

Ben hurls a swivel chair at Reed --

REED CURVES HIS TORSO TO DODGE THE CHAIR

as it crashes through a wall -- Reed gapes at Ben --

REED
What are you talking about?

Ben angrily points to the monitors, as he advances on Reed --

BEN
The station. The malfunction was a fake. The thruster wasn't broken. There was no reason for me to go outside. No reason for me to get trapped in the contraption you built --

With one swing, Ben destroys the chamber Reed was working on --

BEN
-- no reason for me to be a freak -- no reason, except you figured your goddamn theory was more important than my life --

Ben reaches Reed, and he's mad enough to tear him apart. Reed dodges Ben's first swing, then whips his torso around Ben like a python to barely -- just barely -- restrain him. Breathless from the thrashing, Reed twists his neck to be face to face with Ben --

REED
Victor did it -- he planted the malfunction to trick you into the nanochamber --
(winded)
-- by the time I found out, it was too late to stop the transformation.

Ben seems less than convinced -- but he does stop struggling.

BEN
And you had nothing to do with it.

Reed unwinds off Ben and assumes ordinary proportions --

REED
No.

But Ben turns and walks off, disgusted --

BEN
Sure. Sure you didn't. Just like you didn't start lyin' to me the first day I met you.

REED
Ben -- I can explain --

BEN
(doesn't stop)
Yeah, you could. But I've already seen you stretch the truth further than your right arm, and it ain't the thrill it used to be.
(reaches door)
See you around, Richards. Like maybe in a million years.

Ben slams the metal door off its hinges -- leaving Reed to look at the wreckage and wonder what else can go wrong today. As --

OUTSIDE FOUR FREEDOMS PLAZA - **BEN**

storms out, passing some obnoxious, ambushing PAPPARAZZI on stakeout, one with a video camera, one with a 35mm --

CAMERAMAN
Hey! Hey, Thing! Do you use a shower or a sandblaster? The world wants to know --

As soon as the video cameraman steps close enough, Ben, without breaking stride, crushes the video camera lens like a paper cup and shoves the cameraman off balance and on his ass. As the other cameraman helps him up, he indignantly picks up his equipment --

CAMERAMAN
Who'd guess he'd be thin-skinned?

CUT TO:

EXT. THE UNITED NATIONS COMPLEX - DAY - THE SECRETARIAT BUILDING

is the most familiar part of this governmental base: a forty story tower of glass and steel, located on the bank of the East River. Nothing seems unusual here -- until we PAN UP to --

THE OVERCAST SKY - A DENSE, LOW CLOUD

hangs there -- and, unexpectedly, the spherical belly of an enormous airship pokes through -- we can't see it all yet, but this segment of it suggests it's as big as a skyscraper --

-- the bottom of the ship irises open, with the unfolding of a dozen interlocking claws -- and a smaller craft emerges --

DOOM'S SKY-SLED

flies out -- an open, private shuttle that can carry several standing passengers. Doom is literally in full regalia, flanked by a pair of his streamlined, formidable guard **Doombots**.

As the ship tracks silently toward the United Nations complex --

INT. UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUILDING - AT THE PODIUM

the SECRETARY GENERAL is pounding for attention.

The huge room is full of delegates from every nation wearing translation headsets --

SECRETARY GENERAL
If I may have your attention --
(hubbub dies down)
We will now open this special session of the security council, called for resolution 2521, to formally condemn Latveria.

Meanwhile --

INT. "WINDOWS ON THE WORLD" RESTUARANT - DAY - JOHNNY

turns every head in the posh restaurant atop the World Trade Center as he enters with Frankie, the woman with him for his first flareup. Everybody recognizes him -- social climbers say hello, more timid diners whisper his name in a buzz that crosses the room.

As they're shown to one of several dozen booths lining the windows in the wheel-shaped restaurant, overlooking a forty-story view of midtown -- Johnny casually ignites a flaming dessert before a waiter can. As they sit, Frankie, who seems to be the only person unimpressed with Johnny, tries to get his attention --

FRANKIE
Johnny --
(he's waving at someone)
Hello --
(he looks at her)
Listen -- I like you -- but --
(beat)
-- do you ever turn this act of yours <u>off</u>?

JOHNNY
(a little put off)
Well -- yeah, of course --

FRANKIE
Good. Because I want to see what the <u>real</u> Johnny Storm is like.
(smiles)
Let's try another dare. I dare you to make it through the next hour without bragging about some close call, or flaming on. Okay?

Johnny would like to impress her -- but he looks <u>very</u> uncertain -- this punches a colossal hole in his repertoire.

JOHNNY
Uh -- sure -- no problem --
(lost)
What would <u>you</u> like to talk about?

CUT TO:

EXT. LOWER MIDTOWN - DAY - BEN

is walking down the sidewalk, alone, miserable.

BEN'S POV - THE SIDEWALK CROWD AHEAD OF HIM

The faces change, but the reactions of the people who hurl themselves out of his way are always exactly the same. Men fear him. Children laugh at him. Women are revolted by him.

BEN

is sick of the stares -- and he veers down a garbage-strewn alley. Once he starts moving down the alley, though, he sees at the end --

-- the papparazzi seen earlier drive by, looking for the Thing.

In no mood for either a fight or a photograph, Ben decides instead to duck into a doorway -- and --

BEN ENTERS A ROOMY, DUSTY STUDIO WORKSPACE

lit only by the sun pouring in from a skylight. The space is full of at least a dozen sculptures -- we can't see what kind, because they're under dropcloths. Ben pulls the door shut behind him -- and from the other end of the workspace --

ALICIA (O.S.)
(nice but direct)
Thanks for coming in -- but I'm still working on these. The opening's in two weeks, okay?

Between the statues and the dim light, Ben can't see who's talking.

BEN
Sorry. I'll get outta your way in a minute -- as soon as those photographers clear out.

She starts to walk out -- it's a nice silhoette, but you can't see her face yet.

ALICIA
("impressed")
"Photographers"? What, are you a movie star having a bad toup day or something?

Ben turns toward the voice, pissed off --

BEN
Yeah. I'm the blue-eyed idol of millions. And you're either a comedian or you're b--

Before Ben can finish the sentence, ALICIA MASTERS steps into full view. Her eyes are as beautiful as the rest of her, but they don't catch light. They never have and never will.

ALICIA
(comfortable with it)
Blind.
(lightly)
Don't tell anyone else, okay?

Ben now feels dumber than he looks -- he opens the door --

BEN
Listen -- I'm sorry I stomped in like this. I'll get out, and --

ALICIA
(friendly)
I don't like being photographed either. I never get to see how the shots turn out.
(beat)
Why don't you hang out for a few minutes and I'll give you the first look at the show?

Ben doesn't need to be asked twice -- he shuts the door, and we --

CUT TO:

INT. GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUILDING - THE SECRETARY GENERAL

is continuing his harrangue against Doom --

SECRETARY GENERAL
In condemning Latveria's astonishing human rights abuses, we most of all condemn its leader -- Doctor Doom.
(beat)
I will not dignify this tyrant with the royal title he desires.

IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUILDING LOBBY - **DOOM**

strides through with a regal air -- he takes no notice of the metal detector's SHRIEK as he sets it off, as one of the Doombots following him smashes it in half.

A pair of SECURITY GUARDS pick their jaws up off the floor and rush toward Doom -- but he doesn't even give them a glance --

-- the Doombots swat the guards aside forcefully and fatally -- one crumples to the floor, another is hurled up into the Foucault Pendulum dangling from the ceiling. Doom throws open the doors --

INSIDE THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY - **DOOM**

hasn't yet been seen back at the door -- he's just in time for the angry Secretary General to pick up steam --

SECRETARY GENERAL
-- as a figure of evil on the world stage, Doom is surpassed only by Hitler --

DOOM
(booming)
You dare to speak with such insolence?

The commanding, angry voice commands everyone's attention -- the Secretary General pauses, and every single national representative turns to look back at the doorway Doom has emerged from --

-- as they do, Doom raises his right arm -- **an oddly shaped gun is in his hand -- and a beam fires from it --**

THE SECRETARY GENERAL IS HIT BY THE BEAM

and he is caught in the same glow we saw in the nanochamber -- the difference is, instead of molecules being joined together, his are being torn apart -- and he can feel each one of them scatter --

After his features distort in one second of wild, disembodied agony, there is nothing left of him but the CRACK of air rushing in to fill the vacuum left behind.

The general assembly reacts with horrified, stunned silence -- the only sound is Doom's arctic voice slicing through the chamber --

DOOM
Doom is surpassed by **no one.**

Doom strides up the aisle, toward the podium, with a royal bearing -- and the general assembly is now officially, totally, panicking -- those nearest Doom shrink away from him, others try to get out the exits -- but they are all locked --

OUT IN THE LOBBY - THE DOOMBOTS

have control over the security console's computers.

INT. U.N. SECRETARIAT TOWER - **SECURITY LEVEL** - THE SECURITY AGENTS

have never seen, or anticipated, anything like this -- the LEAD AGENT is barking orders to a dozen others --

LEAD AGENT
-- Start full evacuation of the tower, now --

Other agents are frozen, gaping at Doom's speech on the monitors --

IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUILDING - **DOOM** IS AT THE PODIUM

directly underneath the enormous U.N. olive branch seal --

DOOM
It is as ironic as it is convenient that you have called this session to condemn me. It has spared me the necessity of gathering you together so that I may condemn you.
(beat)
I hereby proclaim war against all your petty, failed regimes, in the name of liberating the people of the world to live under one sovereign -- one rule -- one intellect --
(beat)
-- under **Doom.**

MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

look on in horror -- anyone else saying this would seem crazy, but what they've just witnessed lends it chilling credibility. As --

OUTSIDE THE SECRETARIAT TOWER - **DOOM'S SKY-SLED**

flies around the upper stories, pilotless, and it **fires several small missiles at the building** --

IN THE SECURITY LEVEL - THE LEAD AGENT

can see the sled's activity, both on a quartet of tracking camera monitors, and out the window -- he turns to a FEMALE AGENT --

LEAD AGENT
It's fired some kind of missile up to the roof -- check it out --

Without hesitation, the female agent runs out -- as --

IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY - DOOM

builds the intensity of a zealot --

DOOM
You have an alternative. Instead of the empty gesture of condemnation, you may vote to join me in my new age for humanity.
(beat)
The world's people will want for nothing as the royal subjects of Doom. There will be no border squabbles. No hunger. No hatred. Your bodies will be rebuilt to my specifications for life eternal --
(feverish)
-- there will be a millenium of absolute, unassailable peace and tranquility!

Somehow, Doom's maniacal, mechanical voice and clenched iron fist undercuts the peacefulness of his proposed reign -- we GO TO --

THE ROOF OF THE SECRETARIAT TOWER - THE FEMALE SECURITY AGENT

is bent over the broken, smoking husk of the tiny missile -- it looks as threatening as a bottle rocket. She takes out a radio --

AGENT
Threat is negative -- a small missile has impacted, but it looks like a dud -- repeat, threat is negative --

-- but as we look over her shoulder, we see the nanotech payload of the missile is unevenly and rapidly **dissolving the ceiling** --

-- the cracks cobweb across the roof, and a chasm forms under the agent's feet -- she roughly falls to the next floor -- even as --

THE U.N. SECRETARIAT BUILDING

shows signs of having been hit by three nano-missiles on its side -- the molecular rot is spreading **fast** -- and we --

CUT TO:

INT. ALICIA'S STUDIO - DAY - THE SCULPTURES

have mostly been uncovered -- they're all large, stone-carved sculptures of different, relatively ordinary people. What makes them spectacular is the meticulously realistic detail of each one.

Alicia tears off a dropcloth, revealing a stoop-shouldered man on a bench feeding pigeons. As Ben looks around, you can see he's very impressed with all the statues -- and with Alicia. What's more important: as they move around the statues, Ben deliberately is keeping some distance from Alicia. She's treating him like an ordinary guy, and he wants to prolong it for as long as possible.

BEN
(he means her, not the statue)
Beautiful.

ALICIA
(shrugs it off)
Ehh. I think that one might be too -- too community college, you know? Now, this one --

Alicia quickly doubles back to tear off another dropcloth -- and to make sure she doesn't touch him, Ben steps back too fast, and he bumps into another statue, which starts to wobble. Ben reaches up to steady it, and Alicia shoots her arms up too --

ALICIA
Whoa! Careful --

-- but as the statue is steadied, Alicia's hands move along the stone, until they reach Ben's hand and arm. Her hand moves all the way down Ben's arm -- her expression shows how surprised she is --

ALICIA
I know who you are --
(beat)
-- one of the astronauts. From the accident.

-- and Ben looks totally deflated. His moment of normalcy is over.

CUT TO:

INT. FOUR FREEDOMS LABS - DAY - A COMPUTER SCREEN

where the plane fragment was being tested reads: **FRAGMENT ANALYSIS: AIRCRAFT DISASSEMBLED ON MOLECULAR LEVEL --**

We MOVE PAST this into the lab, as we hear Victor's final recorded words from the space station crackling from a speaker --

VICTOR (OVER SPEAKER)
-- pray to **me** for a final annihilation that I will not grant -- I shall be your **doom** --

-- ultimately we find Reed, concentrating on another screen: the top line reads **"TERMINAL ORBITAL TRACK OF ORION STATION"**, and in animation, it shows the path the station took as it crashed. The screen's map digitally moves in to the coordinates of --

-- the mountains of Latveria.

REED

considers this thoughtfully: it seems impossible that Victor could still be alive, and yet --

Reed stretches to shut off the recording of static -- with this new silence, he hears a sound from another room. Something makes Reed check it out -- he stretches down the hallway, and into

THE FOUR FREEDOMS "WORLDWATCH" ROOM

which has panels of electronic equipment monitoring radio and television frequencies. One television shows Doom's speech on CNN with a "BREAKING NEWS" logo. Reed stretches to turn up the volume, and snaps the rest of his body into the room, watching as --

DOOM (ON TELEVISION)
The world I bring you can be paradise -- or perdition. I will grant you twenty-four hours to fully comprehend the perfection of my offered utopia. If I do not hear from your representatives in that time -- the world shall hear from me. In the meantime, my first official act as your monarch is to disband this obsolete cabal --
(calmly)
-- and, as you will no longer have any purpose for this headquarters, in several minutes, it will be destroyed.
(simply, with a regal wave)
I bid you good day.

Doom walks off the stage -- and the TELEVISION CAMERA pans to find the delegates panicking and streaming out of the now open exits --

-- and Reed realizes what's happened -- the nanotech weaponry, the crash in Latveria, the voice -- it all adds up to --

REED
-- Victor.

Reed doesn't pause for a second -- he shoots his body out of the room and into the hall -- he can stretch faster than he can run --

IN THE FOUR FREEDOMS HANGAR - REED

stretches in -- and one arm shoots thirty feet across the room to unerringly flip a dozen toggles to prep the Fantasticar -- as --

-- Reed's other arm snatches a flare gun off the wall --

OUTER VIEW OF FOUR FREEDOMS BUILDING - **REED'S ARM**

extends fifty feet out a window and fires the rocket flare -- it arcs over toward the United Nations, exploding over it --

THE "4" FLARE IGNITES

skywriting the numeral "4" in a circle of fire -- as --

OUTER VIEW OF FOUR FREEDOMS' ROOF - THE TOP

of the slanted segment of the "4" shape slides back with a metallic CLANG -- the slant of the "4" is a maglev launching pad --

-- with Reed in the lead car, the Fantasticar shoots out, its engines igniting -- as --

EXT. ON BROADWAY - DAY - **SUE**

is now visible and walking down the street, still angry about her fight with Reed. But as the crowd near her points up, she looks --

SUE'S POV - **THE "4" FLARE**

is in the distance -- and as her view moves back, she can see the Fantasticar is forty stories up and headed for where she is --

SUE

doesn't hesitate for a moment -- concentrating, she **forms a force field "pillar" directly underneath herself** -- it takes her up like an elevator that is just barely visible around the edges --

-- as she rockets up on the pillar, she's able to curve the track so that it intersects with the Fantasticar -- she seamlessly drops into the side cockpit as it glides by. Meanwhile --

INT. ALICIA'S STUDIO - DAY - BEN

pulls away from Alicia, thinking this moment is over -- but she doesn't look horrified or frightened of him at all.

ALICIA
Everybody calls you the Fantastic Four now, right? You're heroes.

BEN
(flat)
We're a sideshow act. Period.

Alicia moves closer to Ben again -- she knows he's upset, she knows why, and she wants to reach him --

ALICIA
Like I said before -- I'm having an opening here in two weeks. Would you like to come?

BEN
(small, bitter laugh)
Sure. Your artist buddies'd probably think it's hip to have a walkin', talkin' gargoyle at the party, huh?

Alicia doesn't rise to the bait. She's not pitying -- not judgemental -- she's just someone who's been there.

ALICIA
(softly)
You're feeling sorry for yourself. You don't have to, you know.
(sincere)
Come back any time you feel like it. Okay?

Ben realizes that she means it -- and he looks at Alicia with a greater appreciation on his face than she'll ever know. But just as things are looking up -- the Thing looks up to see --

THROUGH THE SKYLIGHT - THE "4" FLARE BURNS

and Ben turns again to Alicia --

BEN
I gotta go, kid. I'm bein' paged.
(heads to door)
But nothin's gonna keep me from coming to your opening.

-- Ben rushes out the door --

IN THE STREET - BEN

raises two stony fingers to his lips to unleash a granite whistle that's as grating as you'd guess --

-- in the street, a taxi speeds by with no intent of stopping -- we'll recognize this as the same cab that splattered Ben earlier.

-- Ben recognizes it too -- and steps out into traffic -- where --

-- Ben grabs the rear of the taxi, crumpling its fender and instantly braking it from 40 mph to zero -- Ben tears the door open, and climbs in, visibly tilting the suspension to one side --

IN THE CAB - BEN

squints at the terrified DRIVER -- and through clenched teeth --

BEN
You <u>are</u> on duty -- ain't ya?

Off the driver's terrifed nod, Ben points up --

BEN
Follow that flare!

INT. "WINDOWS ON THE WORLD" - DAY - JOHNNY

is squirming a little impatiently, since the conversation isn't about him any more -- until he sees, out an opposite window --

THE "4 FLARE

is directly over the U.N. complex --

IN THE RESTAURANT - JOHNNY STANDS UP

in the middle of Frankie's story --

JOHNNY
Sorry, Frankie. Looks like I've lost this dare --
(to other end of restaurant)
Clear that window!

AT AN OPPOSITE WINDOW BOOTH - TWO YUPPIE DINERS

glance at Johnny, sneer, and go back to their Caesar salads --

IN THE AISLE - **JOHNNY FLAMES ON**

igniting his outer clothes -- with a leap, **Johnny flies a blazing path directly toward the window,** leaving cinders that used to be his clothes drifting in his wake --

AT THE BOOTH - THE TWO YUPPIES

now can't get out of the booth fast enough --

FRONT VIEW OF JOHNNY **FLYING THROUGH RESTAURANT**

-- other diners and waiters throw themselves out of his path -- with his hands stretched out in front of him, he **fires a blast of plasma flame at the window ahead** -- not only does the flame incinerate a **"NON-SMOKING SECTION"** sign above the window --

-- it also **liquifies an exit hole in the glass** just in time for Johnny to streak through it. As --

AT THE U.N. COMPLEX - THE FANTASTICAR LANDS ON A LOW ROOF

Reed and Sue get out, amazed -- because --

THE **U.N. SECRETARIAT BUILDING IS DISSOLVING**

Each nano-weapon attacks a different component: one attacks glass, one steel, one concrete -- molecular ripples shudder across the building, making the demolition appear to be a living thing --

-- as the building is **erased,** sections of steel and glass are carved off the bulding and **shear off** --

-- on the ground, people who've managed to get out run for their lives past the flags on First Avenue, away from falling debris --

INSIDE THE TOWER - THE MOLECULAR ROT

is spreading just as fast -- floors and ceilings are filled with irregularly placed, quickly expanding holes, and the matter that hasn't been destroyed is piling up on already-weakened floors --

-- entire slabs of ceiling and floors collapse in on one another -- the thirty-sixth, thirty-seventh and thirty-eight floors cave in with a series of deafening **BOOMS** --

ON THE TWENTY-THIRD FLOOR - A GROUP OF WORKERS ARE TRAPPED

and terrified -- they hear the sounds of the building caving in --

-- unfortunately, the nano-rot has reached the elevators and stairwells. A worker runs for the stairs, but they lead nowhere -- **the floor dissolves under his feet, and he falls to his death** --

REED STILTS HIS WAY THROUGH THE CROWD

which is running like hell away from the collapsing building -- he turns up to see --

REED'S POV - TWENTY STORIES UP - **PANICKED WORKERS**

are hanging out of the dissolving windows, frantically waving -- there are at least three dozen of them --

REED RUNS TOWARD THE BUILDING

with twenty-foot strides -- when he reaches it, he stretches up --

INSIDE THE BUILDING - THE WORKERS

are stuck at the windows, with nowhere to go -- the floor has dissolved, leaving them a two-foot ledge that's **shrinking** -- but --

WORKERS POV - **REED IS STRETCHING UP TOWARD THE BUILDING**

-- and his body **widens out** as far across as the building --

LONG SHOT ON BUILDING - **REED HAS FORMED AN ESCAPE SLIDE**

that's twenty stories high and four hundred feet across --

ON THE BANK OF WINDOWS - THE WORKERS

are dumbfounded -- nobody expected this kind of rescue --

-- Reed literally hugs the building, and the effort clearly is crowding his limits -- he cranes his neck up to face a worker --

REED
(straining from the effort)
-- can't -- maintain this long -- jump --

The worker doesn't need to be told twice -- he leaps into the slide, and is soon followed by the rest -- as --

ON THE "DAG HAMMARSKJOLD LIBRARY" ROOF - **CLOSE ON DOOM**

is on his Sky-Sled, about to leave -- but he sees Reed, and behind the mask, his eyes narrow in recognition and hatred --

DOOM
Richards --

ON THE GROUND - REED

has assumed his ordinary proportions, as the now-freed office workers help each other to get away from the building --

-- Reed doesn't notice Doom is one hundred feet above him on the roof, and he doesn't see **Doom extend his arm to aim down his laser weapon** -- but as he **fires at Reed**--

-- the beam is intercepted by Sue's force field -- it curves over Reed, forming a prism that breaks the beam up harmlessly --

-- Doom turns, furious, to see Sue on the ground by the "Swords Into Plowshares" statue. Doom **aims and fires down at her** -- but --

SUE FADES INTO INVISIBILITY JUST AS THE BEAM HITS

-- and since it's a light weapon, it's rendered useless -- the beam passes through Sue, destroying the statue behind her --

ON THE DAG HAMMARSKJOLD ROOF - DOOM

turns to the Doombots flanking him on the Sky-Sled --

DOOM
Incinerate them both!

The Doombots fly off the roof with boot-mounted jets --

VIEW OVER U.N. COURTYARD - TRACKING WITH DOOMBOTS

as they fly over the hundred flags below -- we can't see Sue, but with arm-mounted flame throwers, they shoot blasts of flame down --

ON THE GROUND - THE FLAMES RAIN DOWN

with random but devastating force -- we can't see Sue immediately, but after a few moments of this, her body is partially covered with smoke and soot -- she is visible and therefore vulnerable --

-- above her, the Doombots see her and converge on her position -- they are about to fire -- but as they do --

THE HUMAN TORCH

intercedes, **flying directly in the path of the flame as it's unleashed** -- Johnny **absorbs the flame entirely** and arcs above the Doombots, invigorated as if he'd dived into a swimming pool.

Before the Doombots can regroup, Johnny **turns their re-amplified flame back on them** -- and both of the robots **explode**, crashing into flaming heaps in the U.N. courtyard -- meanwhile --

EXT. MIDTOWN NEW YORK INTERSECTION - DAY - GRIDLOCK

has occurred -- a dozen cars are frozen in the intersection --

INSIDE BEN'S CAB - BEN

is pissed off -- he's drumming his fingers loudly on the seat, as the cab's stuck at the light. The driver looks back, nervous --

DRIVER
Well, what am I supposed to do?

Angry, Ben gets out of the cab -- and --

IN THE INTERSECTION - **BEN CLEARS THE WAY**

by picking up the cars blocking the cab and moving them onto the sidewalk -- he easily stacks them three-high, and impatiently gets back in the cab, which speeds through the gap -- as --

THE UNITED NATIONS TOWER

is rapidly **falling apart** -- the molecular scattering now makes it look more like an animated Dali painting than a skyscraper. The fact that it's standing at all is a miracle -- pieces shear off to tumble into the center and into the courtyard, and converging, spiralling cavities threaten to cut the building in **half** -- as --

NEAR THE TOP OF THE BUILDING - **THE TERRIFIED SECURITY AGENT**

who had checked the roof is **trapped, dangling from a section that is melting** -- its support gives way, and with no choice, she **leaps twenty feet down to an exposed steel girder** --

-- she hits the girder and hangs on, but her weight tilts it down, and the steel holding it on is **dissolving** --

-- she looks down and sees the building is near **total collapse** at the halfway point -- any way you figure it, she's seconds away from falling forty stories to her death --

AGENT
(screaming down over din)
-- God -- **help me** -- **somebody** --

CLOSE ON THE HUMAN TORCH

-- he's flying about twenty feet up -- but he sees someone in the crowd pointing up, and he looks up to see the stranded woman --

-- **the Torch streaks over** to what's left of the building, and **arcs up the side toward the woman** -- but as he flies up it --

SIX SLABS OF CONCRETE FALL OFF THE SIDE TOWARD THE TORCH

-- they are twenty feet across each, **tumbling like dice down the building's side** -- they're so close, yet so widely placed, that the Torch's only option is to **fly inside the building** --

-- Johnny is driven into a hole a split second before a ton of masonry cleaves through the plasma flame trail he's left behind -- but things aren't really a lot easier there:

INSIDE THE BUILDING - **JOHNNY'S POV - FALLING WRECKAGE**

is **everywhere** -- as he blazes up, zig-zagging through irregularly placed holes in the floors, he **dodges** girders, desks, filing cabinets and anything else that had the floor melted under it --

-- to make matters worse, the density of the rain of wreckage won't let up -- it just drives Johnny towards the center -- as --

OUTSIDE THE BUILDING - THE CORNER SUPPORT IS EATEN AWAY

at the halfway point: it looks like someone took a giant bite out of it. The building **is buckling and starting to cave in** -- the top half is **leaning and starting to fall toward the East River** --

NEAR THE TOP - THE AGENT SLIPS

further down the girder from the top half's leaning -- not that it matters, because in a few seconds, she's wearing the building --

INSIDE THE BUILDING - **THE TORCH**

flies up through a floor-hole, <u>just</u> missing a slab of debris that falls through at him. Johnny sees an escape route of very dangerous moves through the falling debris --

-- Johnny zig-zags through it, desperately trying to make his way back outside the building -- and he finally clears the debris --

OUTSIDE THE BUILDING - JOHNNY FLIES OUT

at about the thirtieth story, but in precisely the same second --

THE AGENT <u>FALLS</u>

off the girder, shrieking as she plummets down the side -- and --

THE TOP HALF OF THE BUILDING TOPPLES OVER

from the weak point of the middle -- and it's **falling on top of the agent and the Torch** --

THE TORCH

sees both problems -- but first things first: he bullets up to grab the agent with an unflamed hand, two-thirds up the building --

-- with the agent dangling from one arm, Johnny arcs to the side, but it's too late -- **the building falls on top of them** --

-- Johnny has two bad options: get crushed by half a skyscraper, or **fly back into one of its holes** -- he chooses the latter -- and

INSIDE THE SKYSCRAPER - FOLLOWING JOHNNY

as he again swerves through irregularly spaced holes in the floors and dodging falling debris -- but since the building is falling, it's ten times as dangerous as before: the debris is coming from the side as well as from above, and the holes he spots are shifting ahead of him before he can get there --

-- Enough of the building has been erased to show that the East River is coming up awfully fast -- but every time Johnny gets tantalizingly near an escape hole in a wall, he has to dodge away from it and through a floor hole to avoid falling wreckage --

-- Johnny flies ahead "up" to the roof, which is now tilting down sideways to the water -- it's now or never: Johnny finds a hole in the bottom corner of the roof and pours it on, racing towards it --

THE TOP OF THE SECRETARIAT BUILDING HITS THE EAST RIVER

with a colossal, explosive **wave of water** that barely misses Johnny and the agent, extinguishing the plasma flame trail behind him as he loops up and around --

-- Johnny and the agent are safe, but the area between the building and the East River's bank is pulverized -- as above --

FROM DOOM'S AIRSHIP - TWO MORE DOOMBOTS

fly out from the docking portion of the ship and head down -- as --

THE REST OF THE SECRETARIAT BUILDING COLLAPSES

like a house of cards -- most of it either follows the path of the top half or collapses inward --

-- but a huge section of the building shears off toward First Avenue, and toward at least a hundred citizens -- amongst them is

SUE - LOOKING UP AT THE FALLING BLOCK

-- it's a hash of concrete and steel girders that's twenty feet square -- it has to weigh at <u>least</u> five tons --

-- there's no way she can stop it, but she has to at least try: instead of running, or encasing herself in a smaller, denser field, Sue **throws a force field umbrella** over the targeted area --

CLOSE ON SUE LOOKING UP

-- she knows there's not a chance this will work -- in fact, she hasn't even made the field wide enough -- but as the tangle of steel and concrete is almost upon them, point-first --

LONG SHOT - **THE THING IS THERE**

-- Ben catches the debris by its leading point, braking it and finally supporting it, even though he's dwarfed by it --

-- some of the loose concrete shakes out of the steel, falling as boulders that safely bounce off of Sue's "umbrella" -- while --

IN THE U.N. FLAG CONCOURSE - **REED**

is being pursued by two newly arrived Doombots -- they're flying over Reed, firing down bomb-bursts as Reed serpentines through a maze of flagpoles. Sooner or later he's going to run out of luck --

IN THE STREET - **BEN**

is still holding onto the debris -- he gets Sue's attention --

BEN
Gimme some room!

Sue moves away from Ben, and drops the "umbrella" force field -- as soon as she does, she forms a pair of huge force field scoops that gently but very firmly shove the citizens away -- as --

-- Ben takes the tangle of steel girders, and spins it around -- once -- twice -- finally releasing it on the third spin --

THE FIVE TON FRAMEWORK

goes **flying** up First Avenue just over the flagpoles -- the trajectory takes it into the flagpoles, which snap like pencils --

-- below it, Reed flattens as the poles go flying everywhere --

-- and the two Doombots try to evade the junk missile, but both are entangled in it as it SMASHES into them -- after a twenty yard flight, the whole thing IMPACTS into the concrete --

CLOSE ON DOOMBOTS

-- they struggle to get up, but they're enmeshed in the girders -- and some of the residual nano-disassemblers go to work on them, rendering them inoperative in a shower of SPARKS.

IN THE STREET - REED

reforms his body to normal proportions, and joins Ben and Sue, a little breathless from the chase, but grateful to Ben --

REED
(panting)
Nice shot, Ben.

BEN
(stony)
What makes you think I was trying to hit them?

Ben is clearly only half-kidding -- and Reed knows it. But from behind -- Doom's voice booms out --

DOOM (O.S.)
The first of my creations. The first to enjoy my benevolence.

DOOM IS STANDING IN THE WRECKAGE

where the tower once was -- the deconstruction is complete. There is nothing left of the tower but half-melted walls and sculptures.

DOOM
Have you come to pay homage to your maker?
(beat)
Or did Dr. Richards' jealousy of my genius prevent him from telling you my role in creating your current form?

IN THE STREET - BEN

is floored at first -- but he looks to Reed, and Reed's face confirms it. Ben's stunned look changes to total rage -- rage that can now be given a focus. Ben starts over to Doom --

REED
Ben, don't -- it's got to be a trick --

Ben hurls Reed fifty feet to the side without missing a step -- Reed painfully collides with a pile of wreckage. Johnny lands, flaming off and helping Reed up, as Ben advances on Doom, his powerful STOMPING shaking loose what rubble is left.

BEN
A trick?
(advances further)
The trick is gonna be finding enough pieces of this son of a bitch to bury --

As Ben marches on Doom, Doom stands perfectly still, his arms crossed in amusement, even up to the point that Ben reaches him --

BEN
Keep smiling, Tin Man --
(raises fist)
-- **it's clobberin' time** --

Ben lets loose a piledriver BLOW -- the impact sounds like a grenade going off -- but --

-- **Doom's body shatters into dozens of small but well-defined pieces** -- it wasn't Doom at all, it was a robot replica --

-- and the expected blow has triggered a mechanical process: the torso, thrity feet from Ben, molecularly reforms into a metal device that resembles two overlapping gyroscopes --

-- as smaller pieces that have gone further afield are also reforming, bonding with nearby inorganic material to become dozens of dense metallic spheres the size of baseballs --

-- at the outer edge of this fast-forming ring of spheres lies the disembodied but intact robot head of Doom --

DOOM REPLICA
-- Very -- well -- put.

The head starts LAUGHING -- and the gyroscopic core **activates** two rotating magnetic fields: one running clockwise, one running counter-clockwise. The fields pick up the metal spheres, rapidly spinning them in two opposite directions. Stuck in the middle is

THE THING

who looks around at the newly created metal spheres, not to mention other isolated metal junk, all caught up in this magnetic tornado -- and he realizes he's made a **big** mistake --

BEN
(quietly)
You gotta be kidding me --

HIGH ANGLE - **THE MAGNETIC VORTEX ACCELERATES INTO HIGH SPEED**

-- Ben tries to struggle his way out, but he is pummeled by the super-dense spheres and is knocked back and forth --

CLOSE ON **THE THING**

under assault -- this is the first time in this form that we've seen Ben in actual physical **pain** -- each step is a struggle as he is battered by the spheres -- with a sickening **CRUNCH**, a sphere hits him hard enough to **chip his hide** --

IN THE STREET - REED, SUE AND JOHNNY

watch in horror -- it's obvious Ben can't last long in this --

SUE
I can't create a force field around him -- the balls are flying too fast --

JOHNNY
They won't fly at all if I melt 'em down.

Johnny **flames on** -- but Reed stops Johnny before he can take off.

REED
Johnny, stop -- we don't even know what alloy those balls are. You'd roast Ben alive before you could melt even one of them.
(starts to stretch)
Stay here --

TRACKING BEHIND REED - **REED STRETCHES INTO THE MAELSTROM**

by **elongating his body to swerve in and out of the balls** -- as Reed snakes through, dodging every one of them --

-- he finally makes it to the metallic core that was the heart of the Doombot. It's imbedded in the ground, and appears impregnable -- but Reed **narrows his fingertips** into infinitely small **pinpoints** and reaches into the gyroscopic machinery --

-- Reed squints in concentration, focusing on this device -- as --

ONE OF THE METALLIC BALLS

seems to change composition -- it falls out of the field, opens up, and picks up a piece of Ben's hide -- as the ball reseals, it flies under its own power up and away -- as --

CLOSE ON THE WHIRRING GYROSCOPIC DEVICE - **REED'S FINGERTIPS**

disassemble the device at its core, all ten fingers seemingly operating independently. Finally, the intricate gadget falls apart.

WIDER ON MAGNETIC FIELD - THE METALLIC BALLS DROP

as the magnetic field dies -- but as the balls drop lifelessly --

-- so does Ben, who falls over with a THOOM.

Reed snakes his body to Ben, and turns him over. He's breathing -- but just barely. As Sue and Johnny rush over too, we go --

INSIDE DOOM'S AIRSHIP - **THE METAL SPHERE**

that took the "sample" from Ben enters the ship through a port -- we follow the sphere until it comes to rest in --

-- **the hand of Doom**, where it opens to reveal the sample of Ben's armor-hide. Doom, in the lead command chamber of his airship, clutches it as if it were the most valuable prize on Earth.

DOOM
At last.

Hauptmann is at one screen, monitoring the battlefield that used to be the United Nations -- he summons the nerve to speak --

HAUPTMANN
Lord Doom -- if I may presume to advise you --
(indicates screen)
Your enemies are vulnerable. If you don't kill them now, they may interfere again --

DOOM
Silence, Hauptmann. They live merely because Doom allows it --
(beat)
-- their services will be required very soon.

Doom closes his hand around the sample of Ben's hide, and stares out the window, high over the world -- it's his for the taking.

OUT AT SEA - **DOOM'S AIRSHIP RETREATS**

-- and for the first time, we see the enormity of it. It looks more like a craft from another planet: it is three hundred feet high and at least a thousand feet across, shaped like an inverted pyramid, and has a silent, vibration-free propulsion system.

As it pulls away from New York, it fires a small missile that arcs down toward the Statue of Liberty -- the missile hits it with an anticlimactic, quiet PUFF -- as we --

CUT TO:

INT. FOUR FREEDOMS PLAZA - DAY - **THE DOOM REPLICA'S HEAD**

is partly disassembled in a chamber made of eight inch sheets of armored glass. Elongated metal tools probe the top of it --

-- and behind the case, Reed works the dissection tools, solemnly looking over monitors displaying high-resolution fiber-optic views of the head's inner workings, as Johnny, Ben and Sue look on.

REED
This is generations ahead of current android technology -- it's run by a biocomputer that perfectly mimics Victor's brain functions.
(stops dissecting)
His nanotech capability is beyond anything I thought possible. Victor can create any weapon, build any kind of technology, or alter any structure, with the same speed and scale as the dismantling of the U.N. building.

SUE
Why didn't the disassemblers keep eating through the rest of the city?

Reed turns from the case, the enormity of the threat sinking in.

REED
The disassembers were self-replicating, but they were designed with a finite life-cycle. If Victor ever decided to unleash a disassember with a longer cycle --
(beat)
-- he could dissolve a city. Or a continent. With an infinite cycle, the entire world.
(beat)
All on a madman's whim.

The others are as shell-shocked as Reed. As crazy as the threat sounds, what they've seen makes it seem believable: A tap into the head's "brain" computer flashes hundreds of diagrams of bizarre weapons and devices on a screen, at subliminal speed --

REED
Even if he doesn't, Doom can build technology no one could oppose. When we worked together, I even provided him with plans for advanced weaponry I'd designed for the military --

DOOM REPLICA (O.S., FILTERED)
Your arrogance is equalled only by your incompetence, Richards --

IN THE CASE - THE DOOM REPLICA'S HEAD

is immobile, but the eyes behind it have come to life, along with the hissing mechanical voice --

DOOM REPLICA
-- though both are dwarfed by your boundless cowardice.

(beat)
I find the notion that your archaic designs are of any value to me whatsoever as amusing as your overwhelming fear.
(beat)
You erred when you abandoned me on the station, Richards. Your craven attempt to kill me instead granted me the means to remake the world to my own specifications. As I once told you -- I will not permit you to keep my vision from becoming reality.
(beat)
Mankind shall enjoy life eternal under my rule. And when next we meet -- each of you shall endure an eternity of death --

With that, the disembodied head begins laughing --

-- and this is too much for Johnny: his right hand **flames on**, and he blasts a jet of fire at the case -- it melts through the armored glass as if it were a block of ice --

-- and the robot head is bathed in flame, still laughing even as it melts into a puddle of molten slag.

Smoke pours from the case as all eyes turn to Reed. What they have to do is obvious -- but he's the one who has to say it.

REED
Johnny -- Sue --
(quiet but determined)
-- prep the jet for long-range flight.

They walk out, leaving Reed and Ben alone. Ben glares at Reed -- and Reed uncomfortably tries to finish their last conversation.

REED
Ben -- I --

BEN
I ain't interested, Richards. I got my own reasons to go after this guy, and none of 'em have anything to do with us bein' pals.

Ben turns his back on Reed, and walks out too --

BEN
The head was right about one thing, though. You screwed up, big-time, in the station.

Reed is stunned -- and Ben fires this over his shoulder --

BEN
If you'd've stopped Victor back when it counted, none of us would have to put our asses on the line to stop Doom now.

CLOSE ON REED'S FACE

-- as he realizes that Ben's right -- and we go out to --

EXT. THE MANHATTAN SKYLINE - THE FANTASTICAR FLIES OUT

over the water, passing what once was the Statue of Liberty -- but now, a nano-missile has **reconstructed it into a statue of Doom** with an upraised fist. As the plane zips by, we --

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CASTLE DOOM THRONE ROOM - DAY - VIEW OF DOOM FROM BEHIND

Doom is standing, contemplatively, in front of an antique mirror -- we can't see the reflection, or Doom's face, but we can see that the **faceplate of Doom's mask** lies on a table.

Doom says nothing. But his body language speaks volumes: he is incredibly tense, and he visibly trembles with rage at his own reflection --

-- until he can take no more. Doom savagely sweeps his arm across, smashing the mirror across the room -- and as he does --

THE HUGE OAKEN DOORS FLY OPEN - HAUPTMANN

storms in --

HAUPTMANN
Lord Doom! Our perimeter radar has located the aircraft --

But Hauptmann freezes in his tracks, and in mid-sentence --

VIEW OVER DOOM'S SHOULDER - HAUPTMANN

is across the room -- we still can't see Doom's face. But we can see, from Hauptmann's fear and horror, that he knows he has made his final mistake.

HAUPTMANN
My liege -- a thousand apologies --
(throws arm across his face)
-- I saw nothing --
(realizes this won't work)
-- I shall tell no one, Lord Doom --

Doom says nothing. With his back still to us, he reaches down with one hand to pick up his mask -- and with the other, he picks up his gun. The sound of the BLAST and Hauptmann's SCREAM are simultaneous -- and --

FRONTAL VIEW OF DOOM - DOOM STRIDES OUT OF THE ROOM

-- his mask seamlessly in place, his regal pride satisfied, as Hauptman's ashes are blown away by the breeze of the doors.

CUT TO:

EXT. OUTER LATVERIA - DAY - OVER MOUNTAIN RANGE - **THE FANTASTICAR**

streaks over a group of towering, impressive mountains -- at the far end of the range sits Castle Doom.

INSIDE THE FANTASTICAR - BEN IS PILOTING

in the lead cockpit, his attention on the "heads up" display of the canopy windshield -- and we can see that the instruments have been fully modified for Ben's enormous, crushing hands.

BEN
That's it -- but I don't know about going in from this side. We're just a little bit conspicuous up here.

REED (ON INTERCOM)
It should be all right, Ben. The data I was able to pull from the android brain indicated this was the most lightly guarded area.

As Reed says this --

GROUND VIEW OF FANTASTICAR STREAKING HIGH ABOVE

-- In a rock outcropping, a rack of missiles swivel horizontally to track with the the plane -- as, elsewhere on the ground --

-- a sextet of different sized missiles roll out of hiding --

-- elsewhere, a stone floor rolls back, revealing more missiles --

-- and **all of them fire, launching up toward the plane** --

INSIDE THE FANTASTICAR - BEN GAPES DOWN

at over a dozen missiles tracking up from ahead, behind, and to the side, as the "heads up" display underlines the obvious by blinking red **WARNING** lights from each direction --

REED (OVER INTERCOM)
However -- it's possible that false data was planted in the android as a ploy --

BEN
(incredulous)
Y'think?

Ben pulls back on the stick for a steep ascent --

ON THE FANTASTICAR CLIMBING FAST - **THE MISSILES**

are a variety of different sizes and speeds -- but the first two are coming up fast, and all are matching Ben's evasive moves --

-- as the first two are almost upon the ship --

-- they hit Sue's force field, formed into a dual looping chute around the plane -- the missiles spiral off the plane harmlessly, one going clockwise, one going counter-clockwise -- but --

-- another pair climb up toward Johnny's side of the plane --

-- and we see another modification to the plane, as Johnny aims his arm out a port, and **fires two flaming blasts** -- the missiles are incinerated before they can even get close.

INSIDE JOHNNY'S COCKPIT - JOHNNY WITHDRAWS HIS ARM

and literally blows smoke off his finger, pleased with himself --

JOHNNY
This is advanced technology? The guy oughtta be named Doctor Dud --

THE FANTASTICAR LEVELS OUT AT A HIGH ALTITUDE

-- and in fact, it looks like many of the missiles are worthless, as most sputter and fall to the ground -- but

LONG SHOT - ON THE GROUND - THE MISSILES

land in a widely dispersed area -- and when they do, each starts a different, rapid **molecular construction** -- as --

ONE MISSILE PURSUES THE FANTASTICAR

-- it's smaller and faster than the others: it even drops a stage to go into overdrive, punching toward the underside of the plane --

-- Johnny fires a flameburst down, and Sue raises a shield, but the missile punches through both barriers and **connects** --

INSIDE THE FANTASTICAR - **THE EXPLOSION**

rocks the entire craft -- but worse, it's weakened the juncture where Sue's segment joins to the craft --

-- Sue's segment is torn away -- it starts to fall to the ground --

IN THE AIR - SUE

falls out of the wreckage of the plane, almost unconscious -- as

INSIDE THE FANTASTICAR - JOHNNY

sees this, but his cockpit took serious damage too -- a shard of bent fuselage metal is across his lap, pinning him down -- and a leak in the fuel line is misting gas into the cabin --

Reed can see Johnny through a hole torn in the barriers --

REED
(shouting over wind)
Johnny -- go get Sue --

JOHNNY
If I flame on, the whole plane'll explode --
(off Reed's frozen look)
Don't worry about me -- go get her!

Reed has no time to hesitate -- he blows the EJECT lever -- and

OUTSIDE REED'S COCKPIT - REED EJECTS OUT OF THE COCKPIT

-- the underseat rockets arc him back to the position where Sue fell out -- but she's falling down while he's going up --

-- Reed undoes the latches holding him into the seat -- without a parachute, Reed goes into freefall after Sue --

ON SUE AND REED FALLING - OVER MOUNTAIN RANGE

-- Sue is plummeting toward a valley filled with mountains -- Reed is reaching down, but he's several hundred feet above her -- as --

INSIDE THE SPIRALLING PLANE - JOHNNY

is pinned by the metal, and the spraying fuel leak is spreading more gas. We can see out the soot-coated windshield that the plane is seconds from crashing into a mountain -- as --

-- **the cockpit wall ahead of him is torn away by Ben --**

BEN
You ever think about landing planes, kid? This is getting kinda expensive --

The mountain in the windshield is coming up fast, as Ben reaches in to tear the bent metal off Johnny's lap. He grimaces in pain --

JOHNNY
Ouch -- watch what you rip out, huh? I'm gonna need those later --

Ben frees Johnny -- and tears another hole in the fuselage --

JOHNNY AND BEN DIVE OUT OF THE PLANE

one second before it **slams into a fireball** against a slab of mountain rock -- Johnny grabs Ben's hand and **flames on,** struggling with Ben's weight as they fly down to an open field -- as --

SUE AND REED CONTINUE TO FALL

-- Sue falls face first past an outcropping, toward a valley lined with jagged rocks far below, while Reed, stretched to a three hundred foot length, spirals behind her like a party streamer --

CLOSE ON REED'S FACE

-- he's now so stretched out that it's physically painful -- but he keeps pushing his limit --

LONG SHOT OF VALLEY - REED IS RIGHT BEHIND SUE

-- but there's two problems: their time is almost up, and even if Reed does grab her, he's not anchored to anything --

-- Reed finally gets the last few inches he needs by stretching his fingers: they lace around Sue in a safety net, as --

AT THE ROCK OUTCROPPING - REED'S ELONGATED BODY

is **still** falling past it, three hundred feet up -- but just as his feet pass, **Reed winds his ankles around it** as an anchor -- and

REED'S BODY GOES TAUT

two feet before Sue hits the bottom -- the velocity of the fall springs them back up in a bungee jump over the outcropping --

ON THE OUTCROPPING - REED AND SUE

both land in a heap on the rock -- Sue is breathless, and Reed looks more like a tangled ball of yarn than a superhero -- as --

OVER A CLEARING LINED WITH BOULDERS - JOHNNY FLIES WITH BEN

-- but Johnny is wobbling all over the place, due to Ben's weight. Before he can land, Johnny's grip slips --

BEN
Hey --

-- and Ben falls twenty feet, landing with a THUD.

BEN
Is that any way to show your gratitude?

Johnny hovers over Ben, shaking the tension out of his sore hand.

JOHNNY
Better lay off the cheeseburgers, big guy --
(points off)
I'm going to see if Reed and Sue need help.

Johnny blazes away -- and Ben starts walking among the boulders.

LOW ANGLE - JOHNNY FLIES OVERHEAD

-- but on the ground, we see that some of the missile components have molecularly reformed some rocks into weaponry: there are at least a dozen **tracking laser guns** built into the rock, equipped with heat sensors that steer them toward Johnny --

ON JOHNNY FLYING - A BARRAGE OF LASER BLASTS

slice through the air, surrounding Johnny from every angle -- he serpentines through them, but the laser weapons form a shrinking, complex gauntlet he has to fly through -- just as --

FURTHER BACK IN THE CLEARING - BEN

sees the spot Johnny's in, and starts loping toward the lasers -- but as he does, he runs in between a pair of mammoth boulders --

-- and another pair of freshly built nano-weapons activate: each boulder has what looks like a metallic disk attached to it, and as Ben moves through, the disks **fire out thirty foot metal tentacles that lash around Ben's arms** --

Ben struggles in the grip of the tentacles -- but they pull taut -- and when they do --

THE CABLES RETRACT - BOTH OF THE GIANT BOULDERS PULL TOGETHER

to **SMASH** into each other at high speed, shattering in an explosion of rock -- and Ben is right in the middle of it -- while --

ACROSS THE CLEARING - SUE AND REED

Groggy, Reed has taken his normal form -- and Sue is helping him through another part of the clearing. But they are between another pair of fifteen-foot high slabs of rock that are in a V-formation -- and we see that nano-missiles have landed here too --

-- in seconds, one slab forms into a **metallic wall** that sprouts dozens of **spikes** the size of rhino horns --

-- while the opposite slab transforms into a matching metal wall with indentations the same size as the spikes. As the construction leads to the junction of the slabs, pistons form to **slam the trap shut on Sue and Reed** --

-- but just as the trap springs, Reed picks up Sue and stretches his torso up, pulling his legs out a split second before it **CLANGS** shut. But with uncertain footing on top of the walls, Reed slips --

-- and Sue falls on the one side of the wall, while Reed falls toward the other. For the moment, they're seperated. Meanwhile --

AT THE OTHER END OF THE CLEARING - A PUNCHDRUNK BEN

is in the middle of the rubble -- he's okay, but the boulders knocked some of the fight out of him. As he staggers out of it --

-- the same thing happens again -- another pair of boulders with nano-attachments lash out metallic tentacles towards Ben --

-- but this time, Ben dodges the grip of one tentacle -- and when the other grabs his arm and pulls taut, instead of yanking boulders together at high speed, it yanks Ben off his feet --

ANGLE ON BEN FLYING AT THE END OF THE TENTACLE

-- he's not worried -- in fact, he's cocking his fist back --

BEN IMPACTS WITH THE BOULDER

-- and as the tentacle draws him in, Ben simultaneously punches the side of the weapon full-force. But instead of breaking it--

-- the nano-weapon releases a jet of gas, and Ben gets a snootful. Instantaneously, Ben staggers back, weakened and in pain -- he stiffens, and falls over, completely paralyzed. Meanwhile --

JOHNNY FLIES LOW OVER THE GROUND

-- zig-zagging through the continuing gauntlet of laser blasts -- as he does, he **fires flameblasts down at the guns** --

-- and in a matter of seconds, they're melted into nano-slag.

Johnny sees Ben, unconscious, and flies toward him -- but from below, another pair of small missiles are fired up.

Johnny fires flamebursts thirty feet ahead, and the missiles blast apart into gaseous clouds -- but when Johnny flies into them --

INSIDE THE CLOUD - JOHNNY'S FLAME EXTINGUISHES

and his body is **covered instantaneously by a coat of ice** -- the cloud was a subzero chemical supercoolant.

Johnny plummets, CRASHING to the ground, stiff and out cold. As --

ACROSS THE CLEARING - REED

sees this, and starts stretching across to help, but --

-- another array of weapons fires underneath him -- these are nozzles that shoot out gray jets of what looks like **cement** --

-- Reed dodges, snaking through them -- but there are dozens of them, and when one of the chemical blasts hit, it instantly **hardens** a cocoon around Reed, thin as paper but strong as steel --

-- the single blast slows Reed -- he tries to dodge other blasts, but he is hit by another -- and another -- and another -- until --

-- Reed, stretched out to forty feet, is coated head to toe with the cement -- he falls to the ground, looking like a bizarre statue, a grimace of pain literally frozen on his face.

NEARBY IN THE CLEARING - SUE

has seen all of this carnage, and horrified, she runs toward Reed -- and she trips the final trap:

-- a ten-foot, **six-prong metal "claw"** pops up under her feet to ensnare her. Reflexively, Sue **throws up a forcefield** to hold the claws back -- but the trap was **designed** for this response --

-- each prong of the claw **electrifies** -- and the result is that it **electrifies the entire field around Sue** -- Sue accidentally **touches one side and is severely shocked into unconsciousness** -- as

REED'S FAR-OFF, SIDEWAYS POV - SUE FALLS OVER LIMPLY

as her field shuts down. We see --

REED'S FROZEN FACE

which is immobile, but something in his eyes tells us he can still see and hear everything that's happening. After a long moment --

-- an armored boot steps into view -- and with a light kick, tips Reed's stiff form over so that he's looking up --

REED'S POV - **DOOM TOWERS ABOVE HIM**

in triumph as his airship hovers overhead.

DOOM
You took my face from me, Richards --
(beat)
-- but I shall extract far, far more from you.

The sole of Doom's boot drops down like a hammer, taking us to --

BLACK SCREEN.

UP FROM BLACK SCREEN - WE HEAR

an echoing, plaintive voice -- the volume makes it sound close, but a tinny, mechanical quality makes it sound far away --

SUE (O.S., FILTERED)
-- Reed --

CLOSE ON REED'S FACE - HE AWAKENS

to find that he is in a mobile, sealed plexiglass cage: Reed is held by **hundreds of small metal claws** that cover him from head to toe to stretch him and restrict his movement. The device is as medieval as it is futuristic, and it was designed with one purpose: to torment Reed Richards.

Reed tries to move his head around, but can't see much --

WIDER ON INSIDE OF AIRSHIP - COMMAND LEVEL

Reed's cage is presently in the enormous upper command level of Doom's airship: Reed sees a sub-orbital view of the Earth from the windows, as well as an array of control monitors -- and --

-- standing by a television monitor that shows Sue, is **Doom**. You'd swear that the mask is actually smiling.

DOOM
It is inconsiderate of you to have slept so long, Dr. Richards.
(indicates monitor)
She has been waiting for hours to say goodbye before her death.

Reed's attention fully focuses on the monitor --

THE MONITOR - SUE

is also trapped in a unique torture device: she is surrounded by several dozen electrodes that unendingly fire lightning-like charges from all directions. Sue has a full-sphere force field surrounding her as insulation -- but her haggard look tells us the effort of keeping it up for hours has exhausted her.

IN THE PLEXIGLASS CAGE - REED

angrily whips his head around to Doom -- and it is stretched back as a response by the metal claws --

REED
Where is she?

DOOM
Even nearer to Hell than you.

Doom gestures to a monitor labelled **HYDROBASE**, as we CUT TO:

EXT. OCEAN FLOOR - DAY - OUR VIEW DROPS THROUGH DARKENED WATER

-- finding a cylindrical, building-sized structure that bores directly into the rock of the ocean floor. Like all other nano-creations, it has the seamless look of something sculpted from one piece. On top, an amphibious plane is docked -- and spoking off from all sides are pipelines that run for miles in the distance.

We DROP down further -- through the ceiling -- and into --

-- a top level of machinery with access to the hatch of the plane, maintained by two Doombots -- below that, we DROP into --

-- the next level, which is smaller -- the structure apparently has a conical design. We get a clearer look at Sue's trap: the lightning bolts continue, and she too has a television monitor in view, this one displaying Reed's horrified face. Our VIEW drops once more, stopping at --

-- the bottom level, where the conical design of the building narrows into a point. Spread-eagled across that point, held by a bizarre X-shaped metal device, is Johnny, also imprisoned in a plexiglass sphere, also in a great deal of pain.

Underneath him is a huge metal pipe that is channelling up heat to the X-contraption Johnny is imprisoned on -- and we can see that the heat is storing up in Johnny until he can't take it --

-- with a SCREAM, Johnny **releases heat energy** into the device --

ON TOP OF THE OCEAN FLOOR - THE PIPELINES

that spoke off from the base **catch the heat** and **radiate it off into the distance in pulses of energy** -- as --

BACK IN DOOM'S AIRSHIP - REED

has stretched painfully to look at another monitor, showing what is happening to Johnny.

REED
What are you doing to him?

DOOM
He is doing it, Dr. Richards. The apparatus underneath him is tapped into a geothermal vent, and it is funnelling up heat in excess of three thousand degrees.
(beat)
I am sure that you are aware his body is capable of storing fantastic quantities of heat, like a battery, and amplifying it --
(off Johnny's SCREAM)
-- until he overloads, and releases the heat into the ocean.

Reed maintains a poker face -- but Doom knows what he's thinking.

DOOM
You may discard hopes for his escape, Richards. The sphere he is encased in carefully and precisely regulates the oxygen content of the air. There is just enough for him to survive. If he attempts to turn that heat energy into flame -- he will asphyxiate.

REED
In the name of God -- why?

DOOM
In the name of **Doom** -- an object lesson.

Reed swivels his head around, as far as he can, to look at

REED'S POV - THE CONTROL PANELS OF THE AIRSHIP

show, beyond an array of controls that regulate the airship itself and the sub-oceanic base, more computer monitors: one monitors **OCEAN TEMPERATURE: QUADRANT ONE - 169 DEGREES FAHRENHEIT**, and three others show similar readings, all with **rising temperatures** --

-- another screen monitors **WINDSPEED - 211 MILES PER HOUR** --

ON REED'S FACE

as he puts it all together -- but he still can't believe it --

REED
It's impossible --

DOOM
Trust your instinct, Dr. Richards --
(triumphant)
-- nothing is impossible to Doom.

REED
(stunned)
You're raising the ocean temperature over one hundred and fifty degrees in a thirty mile area -- and when it reacts to the colder air above it --
(still incredulous)
-- you'll create a hurricane.

DOOM
(offended)
Such a mundane name for my instrument of wrath. This storm will be remembered by the world as the first **hypercane** -- and the true dawn of my global reign.

As Doom gestures to the instruments and the windows, we look --

OUTSIDE THE AIRSHIP - AT A SUB-ORBITAL HEIGHT

-- we see Doom's airship is at least fifteen miles over the Atlantic Ocean -- and beneath it, we can see the **white swirl of the storm has already formed** near the East Coast --

INSIDE THE AIRSHIP - DOOM FACES REED

proudly, pointing to the accelerating **WINDSPEED** monitor --

DOOM
Within two hours, the strength of the winds will increase to five hundred miles an hour --
(points to map)
-- and as it follows the Gulf Steam back toward New York City --

REED
-- it'll be demolished. That storm could live for weeks, spinning all over the country -- and do more damage than a dozen atomic bombs.
(beat)
You'll kill millions -- tens of millions --

DOOM
(shrugs it off)
-- and rescue nearly four billion from the random tyranny of the world's governments. The annals of history will record that they died in the service of mankind.
(resigned)
A regrettable, but necessary, step to insure that none dare oppose me. I take no pleasure from their deaths. But I will derive supreme pleasure from yours.

CUT TO:

INT. THE HYDROBASE - BOTTOM LEVEL - JOHNNY

is weakened -- only intense pain keeps him awake. But as heat filters through him, the entire structure is rocked by a **tremor** --

ON SUE'S LEVEL - THE TREMOR

shakes the walls and the floors -- but the equipment firing the lightning bolts at Sue continues unabated. As --

INSIDE DOOM'S AIRSHIP - A COMPUTER **ALARM**

goes off -- a monitor of the ocean base conditions reads --

HEAT GENERATOR - CRITICAL

Doom reacts with little more than clinical interest --

DOOM
Fascinating. I was certain that your companions would expire long before the heat destroyed the structure.
(offhand)
Their survival to this point has served Doom well, but their tasks are complete. His, as the final circuit for the hypercane --

On the screen monitoring Johnny's trap, we see and hear **another tremor** -- the screen **blanks out into white noise** --

-- and Doom gestures to Sue's monitor.

DOOM
-- and hers, as the first step of an eternity of torment for **you.**

Reed, anguished, turns his head to the monitor -- and another growing **tremor rumbles through the room** -- walls are visibly crumbling, and Sue turns to the camera --

SUE (ON MONITOR)
-- Reed -- I lo--

Before she can say it, another **blast** apparently destroys the camera and the room --

REED
-- **NOOOOOOOOOO** --

Doom's **laugh** grows as loud as Reed's scream -- as we --

CUT TO:

INT. THE HYDROBASE - THE BOTTOM LEVEL IS ROCKED BY TREMORS

and clearly isn't going to last very long -- within the plexiglass sphere, Johnny is still alive. Falling wreckage from the ceilings and walls tumble onto the sphere, but they won't shatter the glass -- Johnny's going to have to get out of this himself.

IN THE SPHERE - JOHNNY IS TRAPPED IN THE METAL BONDS

of the heat siphon -- but as the room around him collapses, we can see Johnny is concentrating and holding his breath --

CLOSE ON JOHNNY'S RIGHT HAND - **A SMALL FOCUSED FLAME**

shoots out of his fingertip -- he strains to get it long enough to reach the side of the sphere, and hot enough to go through --

-- the flame reaches the glass with the tiniest of sizzles -- it's clearly meant to withstand extreme heat -- as --

IN THE LEVEL ABOVE - SUE

is in a similar predicament -- the room is caving in, but the device that has her trapped is still fully operational, firing lightning bolts from all directions. Beneath her --

IN THE SPHERE - JOHNNY IS ABOUT TO PASS OUT

from lack of oxygen -- but his flame has almost burnt a hole through the glass -- there's one thin layer to go, as his flame starts to die out --

-- Johnny struggles to keep the flame alive -- and with the last bit of flame he can summon, and the last trace of oxygen --

-- the flame burns a dime-sized hole in the glass -- as the sphere's vacuum is broken, **air rushes into the sphere** --

-- and the pent-up heat inside **Johnny ignites in an explosion of flame that blows the sphere and the heat siphon to bits**!

Johnny pauses long enough to enjoy one deep breath before blasting upwards, burning a hole in the ceiling ahead of him just before the level's walls cave in --

IN THE NEXT LEVEL - SUE IS TRAPPED

in the lightning field, but Johnny burns up through the floor -- and in seconds, his fireballs destroy the lightning apparatus.

Exhausted, Sue drops her force field and falls to her knees -- and Johnny helps her up with an unflamed hand. But the structure is hit with another **tremor** -- Johnny looks very uncertain --

JOHNNY
-- Now what?

SUE
(weakly)
They took us down in some kind of amphibious plane -- it may still be up there --

JOHNNY
-- Hold on!

Johnny grabs Sue's hand and flies up toward the ceiling, **burning an escape hole through it** -- both of them fly up to --

THE TOP LEVEL OF THE HYDROBASE - SUE AND JOHNNY FLY UP

to find the level is wrecked -- even the two Doombots lie buried. But Johnny sees a ladder for the docking hatch of the plane --

JOHNNY
There's the hatch -- we're outta here.
(smiles at Sue)
It doesn't come much closer than that, huh?

Just as Johnny declares victory --

-- a ceiling crack gives way -- and a **high pressure jet of water blasts** through the ceiling, **extinguishing Johnny's flame** -- he and Sue **fall fifteen feet to the wreckage of the floor** --

-- and the ceiling crack, under pressure of millions of tons of water, **spreads** -- **until the entire ceiling collapses on Sue and Johnny, with the ocean rushing in right behind it** --

ON SUE AND JOHNNY - AS THE WATER AND CEILING

fall on top of them, Sue **throws up a force field bubble** around herself and Johnny, with the last of the air in the room -- in a split second, they are **surrounded** by the ocean, and the pressure of it even pushes Sue's bubble **inward** --

-- and the rush of the ocean current sweeps up the debris of the base, as well as Sue's force bubble -- suddenly, she and Johnny are caught in the current, totally out of control --

INSIDE THE BUBBLE - JOHNNY AND SUE

brace themselves against the bubble's sides -- as they're swept along the mountains and canyons at high speed, the bubble **collides against huge boulders**, caroming between them like billiard balls --

Johnny struggles to stand up -- and Sue not only has to try to keep from falling over, she has to struggle mentally: imagine being in a demolition derby where the only thing holding your car together was your concentration --

SUE
(straining)
I -- can't take this much longer --

But Johnny sees something, and points --

JOHNNY
Look!

AHEAD OF THE BUBBLE - THE **AMPHIBIOUS PLANE**

seems intact -- it's being swirled around with other wreckage, and the currents are taking the bubble in the same general direction.

INSIDE THE BUBBLE - JOHNNY AND SUE

hold on as they roll all over the place -- they roll tantalizingly close to the amphiplane -- they touch it, then carom away --

JOHNNY
If we get close enough -- can you attach us to the bottom of the hatch?

SUE
(headache-induced sarcasm)
Sure -- what could be easier?

THE BUBBLE RICOCHETS OFF OCEANIC BOULDERS

following the current, always **just** behind the flipping plane -- until they're driven into an oceanic **canyon** -- both the plane and the bubble are bounced against opposite canyon walls -- until --

-- the plane is thrown toward the bubble for a collision -- the plane's underside **SLAMS** into the bubble at high speed --

INSIDE THE BUBBLE - SUE

feels the impact with as much pain as if the bubble were a physical part of her -- but she maintains enough control to open the field just enough to bond it with the plane's underside --

-- not that it's easy going yet: the plane, with the bubble attached, is still flipping in the current -- and the water that rushed in when Sue opened the field is sloshing around --

-- but Johnny is able to reach the hatch -- he forces it open and climbs in, then drags Sue in --

-- as Sue is drawn into the plane by Johnny, the force field bubble **collapses** behind her, and its air bursts up -- as --

INSIDE THE AMPHIBIOUS PLANE - JOHNNY AND SUE

both struggle toward the seats and strap themselves in. As the ship continues to be tossed around the canyon, Johnny eyes the odd, Doom-designed control panel uncertainly --

SUE
Can you fly this thing?

JOHNNY
(has no idea)
Ab-so-lutely --

Johnny tentatively throws a switch -- and nothing happens. As --

IN THE OCEANIC CANYON - THE CURRENT IS DRIVING THE SHIP

very quickly toward a **solid wall** -- we see it pulverize one chunk of debris. The ship is seconds from the same fate -- as --

IN THE SHIP - JOHNNY SEES THE WALL COMING UP FAST

-- and as he eyes the controls, you can almost hear him think "eeny meeny minie moe" -- finally, he throws another switch --

-- and the ship **powers up** -- Johnny pulls back on the stick, and the ship tracks up one second before hitting the wall -- just as they pull up, another chunk of debris **shatters** against the wall.

AS THE SHIP GOES UP - JOHNNY

can see from the control panels, and the brightening light ahead of them in the water, that they're almost to the surface. Once again, he's his own biggest hero --

JOHNNY
(shouts)
Yee-haaaaaaaaaaaaa --
(turns to Sue)
Now that is as close as they come --

But as soon as the ship reaches the surface --

THE AMPHIBIOUS PLANE FLIES OUT OF THE WATER AND INTO THE STORM

and it's tossed around by three hundred mile an hour winds -- they're near the inner center of the eyewall of the hypercane.

INSIDE THE PLANE - JOHNNY

struggles as the plane is flipped around like a half-dollar --

-- ultimately, Johnny pulls the plane level -- and a few stomach-wrenching moments later, guides the plane out of the intense winds of the eyewall, and into the bizarre, totally windless calm of

THE EYE OF THE HYPERCANE - THE PLANE SPIRALS UP IT

-- and from inside, we get a sense of the enormity of this thing -- it's a tight, narrow eye that goes up at least ten miles.

INSIDE THE PLANE - JOHNNY AND SUE LOOK OUT AT THE EYEWALL

in complete awe -- nobody's ever seen a storm like this. It is as endless as it is ferocious, and the obsidian sides of the eyewall are veined with the erratic red, blue and green lightning blasts found only in extreme storms. Johnny and Sue are safe for the moment -- but they have nowhere to go and they're powerless to stop the storm. As they circle up the eye -- we --

CUT TO:

INT. DOOM'S AIRSHIP - A MULTIMIRRORED DOME CHAMBER - BEN

is standing, weak but awake, imprisoned by thick, powerful bonds that hold him in the dome's center. Above Ben, the dome is lined with thousands of mirrors, and tens of thousands of microlasers. At the sound of an electronic door WHISKING open, Ben looks up --

DOOM

enters regally, attended by several Doombots who are hauling Reed's cage enclosure behind them -- the apparatus is surrounded by some kind of magnetic frame that allows it to levitate. It's clear that Doom wants to be able to keep his trophy near him.

Ben sees Reed is, physically and emotionally, shattered: he is stretched across the inside of the cage, drooping like a captured flag. Before he can speak, Doom takes over, walking closer to Ben.

DOOM
You hate me, don't you, Grimm?
(no answer)
You believe that I am responsible for your monstrous appearance.

BEN
Look who's talkin'. From what I can see, Doc, that mask is your best invention yet.

DOOM
(totally unaffected)
True, Grimm. Behind this mask I am as malformed as you. We have much in common. We both owe a debt of misery to Reed Richards. He alone is to blame for the incidents that have scarred us both. He alone prevented my further research into the technique of biological nanotechnology. Though I have achieved total mastery of the physical world, successful reconstruction of living tissue has eluded me. Until now.

BEN
I think you got more in common with Richards than you think --
(beat)
-- the both of you can bore me right into a coma in no time flat.

DOOM
Would your boredom lessen if I told you that it is within my power to restore your humanity?

Ben is thunderstruck -- but tries regardless to maintain a poker face. He wants his humanity back -- but he doesn't want to show Doom how badly. Doom continues to walk around the lab --

DOOM
When your body was transformed, the nanochamber ran through twenty-three seperate reconstructive cycles, each building on the last, each involving trillions of bits of data. It would be impossible to calculate the odds of blindly working backwards to your previous form -- or what kind of abomination you might become if the attempt were made.
(beat)
However, when I crashed into the mountains of Latveria, with the remains of my earlier, primitive nanochamber, much of the equipment survived -- including --
(he picks up a cartridge)
-- the complete record of your transformation.

Doom holds the data cartridge up as if he's holding Ben's soul -- and in spite of himself, that's just the way Ben is looking at it.

DOOM
Every single atom of what you once were is contained in this cartridge. When I obtained a sample of your, for lack of a better word, <u>skin</u> -- I was able to solve the problems involved in changing you back completely.

Ben's determined to hide how much he wants that done --

BEN
(sarcastic)
Gee -- sounds like that's my cue to beg.

DOOM
You are no position to request anything, Grimm. Nor to refuse the largesse of Doom.

Doom inserts the cartridge into an elaborate computer bank. As it powers up, the mirrored dome above Ben **lights up**, and transparent shields drop down, sealing Ben in an octagonal booth. This is a nanochamber, but with as much in common with the first as the Kitty Hawk has with a Stealth bomber.

DOOM
This experiment is merely to confirm that I have mastered reformation of living tissue. A necessary first step toward restoring my own features -- and freeing humanity their own pathetic, flawed forms.

BEN
Who writes your dialogue, Doc? Bela Lugosi?

Doom activates the nanochamber, as Reed wearily lifts his head --

IN THE MIRRORED DOME - BEN IS TRANSFORMED

by a blue laser parabola refracting from the mirrors, altering his body, aspect by aspect: he loses his orange pigmentation in one cycle -- in another, his stone skin softens into hide --

AT THE CONTROL PANEL - A MONITOR

reads **TRANSFORMATION CYCLE - NEGATIVE**, with a bar graph that shows a decreasing percentage as the changes effect --

CLOSE ON BEN

-- as he becomes, recognizably, human: his hide becomes skin, his proportions shrink, and the restoration is so precise that his hair returns, as does a cut on his face from the station. Absent the space suit, this is exactly how he looked before.

Abruptly, the lasers cut out and the machinery shuts down -- and Ben easily slips his hands out of the Thing-sized manacles, looking at his restored body in disbelief, assaulted by a wave of conflicting emotions. He wanted this more than anything -- but it's at the worst possible time, from the worst possible source.

DOOM
Excellent. Now there is truly no boundary to my power.
(as Doombots GRAB Ben)
You should be proud, Grimm. You have served Doom as honorably as the others.

The Doombots start to drag Ben off -- but he's taken aback by that last crack, and looks to Reed --

BEN
What -- what's he talkin' about?

Reed lifts his face, miserably, toward Ben --

REED
(utterly defeated)
Johnny -- Sue -- they're --

Reed trails off -- he can't make himself say it -- but the stunned look on Ben's face shows he can finish the sentence. So can Doom --

DOOM
(casually)
Their service to Doom has concluded. As has yours.
(to Doombots)
Dispose of him.

The Doombots drag Ben out the door -- as we --

CUT TO:

EXT. **THE HYPERCANE'S OUTER EDGE - OVER WATER** - DAY

The omnidirectional ROAR is deafening -- and for the first time, we see the outside of this storm. Take the most frightening shot of hurricane footage you've ever seen -- and multiply it. The hypercane is twice as tall, four times as strong, and moving five times as fast as the strongest recorded hurricanes.

It's eight miles high, and the tight knot of the storm, with winds howling at four hundred miles an hour, advances at sixty miles an hour: essentially, the short way of describing this is as a tornado with the circumference of Los Angeles County.

The outer edge of the hypercane reaches a small island -- and in seconds, it is blasted apart by the winds and then engulfed by the storm surge, completely scouring it off the face of the Earth.

CUT TO:

INT. NEW YORK - YANCY STREET BAR - DAY - THE TELEVISION

is tuned to a news bulletin -- and something about the unusually shaken look of the WEATHERMAN draws the attention of everyone, as he points to an offshore storm and a map of the northeast --

WEATHERMAN (ON TELEVISION)
-- the thing to remember with a storm like this is, not to panic. But the fact is, no -- no one has ever <u>seen</u> a storm like this --
(rattled, points to map)
It developed from nowhere in just a few hours -- and it's moving on a direct track toward New York at sixty miles an hour --

ELSEWHERE IN NEW YORK - IN A HOSPITAL DAY ROOM - ANOTHER TV

is in the midst of a different, but equally frantic, newscast -- the ashen NEWSMAN eyes data on a bulletin, and a satellite photo on the screen behind him with equal disbelief --

NEWSMAN
-- this -- this can't be right -- the sustained winds have been measured at four hundred miles an hour and climbing --

ON A NEW YORK HIGHWAY - THE TRAFFIC JAM

to end all traffic jams is in place -- the road is choked with so many people trying to escape, that there's no movement whatsoever, and panicked EVACUEES are abandoning their cars to flee on foot.

CUT TO:

INT. DOOM'S AIRSHIP - LOWER DOCKING LEVEL - DAY - BEN IS SHOVED

out of a gantry door by two Doombots. Ben is at the ship's bottom level: a circular level containing smaller crafts such as Doom's Sky-Sled, mounted in racks in the walls. As a Doombot operates a control panel, thirty feet beneath these circular catwalks --

A CIRCULAR SEGMENTED DOCKING DOOR

big enough to take in any size aircraft **irises open** with a groan and a RUSH of air -- revealing a fifteen mile drop to the Atlantic.

AT THE TOP OF THE CATWALK - BEN

looks down as the air blasts up -- it's obvious that he's here to, literally, walk the plank: the wall's catwalk has a protrusion into the center with no protective rail. One of the Doombots is about to shove Ben forward -- but --

-- Ben sees a rack of machinery on one side, with a panel held in place by a metal bar the size of a baseball bat. Before the Doombot can grab him, Ben **dives for the rack** to **grab the bar** --

-- The Doombot reaches for a laser gun -- but just as it raises the gun, Ben swings the bar and connects, knocking the Doombot slightly off balance. More importantly, the gun goes flying --

-- and clatters across the catwalk, stopping at the end of the "plank", perilously close to falling off.

With just a second to react as the other Doombot reaches for its gun, Ben dives onto the plank, rolls, and grabs the gun before it can fall, coming up in a perfect ready-to-shoot pose worthy of a Kirby cover -- but as he smiles and fires the gun at the Doombot --

-- nothing comes out but a couple of loud clicks. Ben looks at his hand: apparently this gun is good for posing and nothing else --

IN THE DOOMBOT'S HAND - THE LASER GUN

fires laser blasts at Ben, and we can see it draws its power from a **battery terminal** in the Doombot's hand --

ON THE CATWALK - BEN

is driven back, dodging the Doombot's blasts -- and, off balance, he **falls** with a fast-fading **YELL** --

ON BEN FALLING TOWARD THE DOCKING HOLE

-- Ben, the useless gun and the metal bar fall towards nothing --

AT THE CATWALK RAIL - THE DOOMBOT

bends over to scan down and confirm that Ben is gone --

THE DOOMBOT'S POV - A HIGH-RESOLUTION VIDEO IMAGE

reveals that something is falling into the clouds below -- as it PANS around the edge, a line reads **"HEAT SCAN READING - NEGATIVE"**.

AT THE CATWALK RAIL - THE DOOMBOTS

turn back unemotionally, their task complete. One stops at the docking door controls -- as --

UNDERNEATH THE SHIP - BEN IS HANGING ONTO THE METAL BAR

which has one end wedged in between two of the retracted segments of the enormous door. Ben is, barely, hanging onto the other end beneath the ship, literally flapping in the breeze. Suddenly --

-- the door's segments **grind to life** slowly, but with enough force that they bend the bar and cut it in half -- it drops away --

-- and Ben is just able to reach up and grab the edge of one of the segments -- but the segment he's grabbed is about to **grind** closed against another segment, and if Ben gets caught in the middle, the top half of him is going to be in the airship and the bottom half is fish food --

-- struggling against the slipperiness of the metal, Ben **pulls himself up** over the edge of the segment just before he's scissored by the segment near it -- and --

INSIDE THE AIRSHIP - BEN

rolls back on the segment as the rest shut the rest of the way, shaken, but momentarily safe. He starts to climb up, as we go to --

DOOM'S MAIN CONTROL LEVEL - DOOM

is staring out the window, a safe distance above the atmospheric swirl of the hypercane. From this vantage, you can also see the storm isn't all that far from reaching the East Coast. Back from the window, hovering in place, is Reed's case-prison.

DOOM
(staring at his world)
Hell is borne from a thousand thrones --
(beat)
-- but Heaven shall be borne of Doom's.

REED
(weakly)
You're insane.

Doom turns, disappointed that Reed can't see it.

DOOM
A pity. In another life, I thought your mind potentially equal to my own.
(moves closer to case)
We both meant to bend the world to our vision, Richards. Your puny vision faltered. The vision of Doom had to prevail.

REED
(contemptous)
You really believe it, don't you? That you're a god?

Doom's certainty remains unshaken -- he bends closer to the case --

DOOM
The power to create, or to annihilate absolutely --
(beat)
Enlighten me, Dr. Richards -- what capabilities are possessed by God that are not also possessed by Doom?

Reed doesn't even try to continue the debate with this lunatic. A pair of Doombots arrive, mutely bringing in another plexiglass case that is magnetically hovering. We'll note that it is almost exactly the same dimensions as Reed's prison --

-- but as the Doombots guide it closer, we see that the inside of the case is segmented into four dozen equally sized cubes --

DOOM
In another life, you told me that if our experiments were successful, that they would be allowed to proceed with living subjects --

-- and as the case is moved, we see the cubes in the case **contain bio-nano test material**, with labels like **"BIO-NANO DISASSEMBLER:** SEQUENCE 3.12". Reed realizes what this means -- as --

WITHIN REED'S CASE - A SEGMENTER PINS HIM TO THE GLASS

so that Reed's body is separated into four dozen individual "cubes" that match the test case -- meaning Doom intends to very scientifically try at least forty-eight types of death on Reed. Now completely immobilized, Reed can't move or speak at all --

DOOM
-- I respect you for living up to your word.

As Doom prepares to hook up the cases --

OUTSIDE DOOM'S CONTROL CENTER - BEN'S POV

-- Ben can see that Reed is in pretty dire straits, and from the looks of the hypercane's status screens -- **"WINDSPEED: 441 MILES PER HOUR", "LANDFALL: 05:14:01"** -- so are a lot of other people.

IN A CORRIDOR - BEN WATCHES FROM A SAFE DISTANCE

-- he's still winded from his climb, and he's determined to do something, but realistically, he's human again, he's unarmed, and for that matter, all he's wearing is a pair of baggy blue trunks. Before he can begin to formulate a plan, he hears the SOUND of --

-- a Doombot approaching, twenty feet away -- and it's detected him. As it reaches for and raises its laser weapon --

-- Ben runs down the corridor, just ahead of a series of laser blasts that perforate the walls behind him. As the blasts hit the walls, we see another advantage of nano-construction: the holes in the wall are able to automatically repair themselves. Still running, Ben tries to get around the airship's central gantry --

-- but he runs headlong into another Doombot, which draws on him. Caught between two opposing volleys, Ben is driven forward into --

THE AIRSHIP'S CENTRAL GANTRY ELEVATOR - BEN

punches the button, and it starts going up -- but Ben is not even allowed a moment's respite --

-- **two blasts fire up from the elevator's floor** -- because --

THE DOOMBOTS ARE FLYING UP THE SHAFT

after the elevator car --

INSIDE THE ELEVATOR CAR - BEN FLATTENS AGAINST THE WALL

as laser blasts fire up past him -- after a very long moment, the car reaches the top level and stops --

ON THE TOP LEVEL - BEN HURLS HIMSELF OUT OF THE ELEVATOR

just before the blasts completely melt it into a tangle -- with no time to recover, Ben runs into --

ONE OF THE LABORATORIES - BEN CLOSES THE SLIDING METAL DOOR

-- it SLAMS down just as we see the Doombots emerge from the elevator's wreckage nearby, as the wreckage "rebuilds" itself. Ben seals the door by SMASHING the controls, which spark out. Ben looks around for defensive weapons -- there are none. He finally realizes this is the lab that contains --

THE NANOCHAMBER

that returned his humanity -- or could turn him back into the Thing. The **BOOMING** of the Doombots against the door grows louder --

CLOSE ON BEN'S FACE

as he wrestles with two lousy options: to definitely get slaughtered as a man, or perhaps to live on as a hideous monster. It's a choice no one would ever want to make -- and he's got maybe three seconds to decide. Ultimately, only one choice is possible --

Ben turns to the control panel -- it still has the data cartridge Doom installed in it for his last transformation -- and working the controls as Doom did earlier, Ben activates the chamber --

-- and as the plexiglass shutters drop down, Ben runs under them to get in as the laser matrix weaves under the mirrors.

ON THE CONTROL PANEL - A COMPUTER BAR GRAPH

advances as one monitor reads **"TRANSFORMATION CYCLE - POSITIVE"** --

CLOSE ON BEN - **THE TRANSFORMATION**

is painfully **tearing him apart** and rebuilding him, cycle after cycle -- as --

IN THE CORRIDOR - THE DOOMBOTS

are rhythmically pounding the lab door in -- they're practically there, when --

-- the dented remains of the door are **ripped away** from inside -- revealing that --

THE THING

is back -- and he looks completely unimpressed with the Doombots.

BEN
Sorry it took so long to answer, guys --
(flings door aside)
-- I was busy changin'.

With that, Ben rears back a fist, and **uppercuts one of the Doombots** -- it **flies apart** against the ceiling like a cheap crash test dummy -- as, below --

IN THE COMMAND LEVEL - **DOOM**

is starting the tests on Reed, whose confinement against the glass makes him look like a painting Dali started and Picasso finished. But the **SOUND** of the fight makes Doom look up in surprise -- and

A DISMEMBERED DOOMBOT CRASHES THROUGH THE CEILING LIKE A MISSILE

with so much momentum that it **also smashes through an outer wall** of the airship, falling out of sight --

-- the shock of it knocks Reed's cage to the side -- as it caroms off a wall, a corner of the plexiglass cracks --

CLOSE ON ONE SEGMENT - **REED'S EYE**

narrows in concentration, recognizing the opportunity -- as --

DOOM

angrily stares up at the hole in the level above him -- the hole starts to seal up from the automatic nano-repairs -- but Ben's orange mitts come into view and pull it apart again --

-- and with a THOOM that shakes the level, Ben drops down opposite a disbelieving, angered Doom --

DOOM
It's impossible --

BEN
Reality check, Doc.
(beat)
It ain't a dream -- it ain't a hoax -- it ain't even an imaginary story --
(advances on Doom)
-- It's clobberin' time --

At that moment --

IN THE GLASS CASE - REED HAS PUSHED ALL HIS MASS INTO ONE CORNER

to press against the bulging crack in the glass, until it **bursts** into a small hole --

-- **and Reed's body shoots out in a long single strand,** like a toothpaste tube run over by a steamroller. Reed assumes his ordinary shape, weak, woozy, and holding his head -- just as --

BEN STALKS TOWARD DOOM

with his fists clenched, but Doom looks calm -- because, one second before Ben's fist drops on Doom like a hammer --

-- the floor underneath Doom opens in a clean, molecular aperture. Doom drops away into the next level as the hole molecularly weaves shut behind him.

Ben, frustrated and incredulous, looks down at the floor --

BEN
Damn it -- what does this joker do, carry around a bag o' holes like Wile E. Coyote?

Reed, recovering, moves over to the control panels of the ship --

REED
I'm not sure who you're referring to, Ben, but the rest is perfectly obvious.

REED
(beat)
Doom has mental control of the nanotechnology in his armor through amplified brain signals broadcast to individual molecules. Similarly, this aircraft has an automatic molecular repair function -- ergo, Doom has simply increased his mental signal to give him total local control over the ship's molecules.

BEN
(blankly)
I'll make you a deal. When we get out of this, I'll tell you who Wile E. Coyote is, if you tell me what you think "obvious" means.

Reed looks at Ben's form, and realizes the sacrifice he's made --

REED
Ben -- I'm sorry you had to go back to --

BEN
(cuts him off)
Don't be. Right before we blow this joint, you're gonna run me through that microwave one last time, on the "Ben Grimm" setting. Meantime --
(he kneels over floor)
-- I guess I'm old-fashioned, but I still like makin' holes the hard way.

With that, Ben **slams his fist down** on the floor, punching through a hole, which he tears back into a hatch. Ben drops through, and the hole seals up after him -- as --

REED IS AT THE CONTROLS

stretching his neck to scan the bizarre monitors -- at the same time, he sees the hypercane miles beneath him at the window. Against the swirling cloud of the eye -- a black speck flies out --

CLOSE ON REED'S FACE

as he realizes what this could mean -- he whips his neck along the control panel, finding a radio control -- as --

INSIDE THE AMPHIPLANE - JOHNNY AND SUE SPIRAL UP THE EYEWALL

over the spectacular, erratic blue and green lightning that BOOMS through the eyewall -- from their vantage, they can see Doom's airship high above them. Just then, the radio opens up --

REED (O.S., RADIO)
(uncertain, hopeful)
Sue -- Johnny -- are you there?

Startled, but elated, Sue flips a radio mike switch --

SUE
-- Reed -- We just managed to get out --

INSIDE DOOM'S AIRSHIP - REED

smiles as widely as only he can in relief --

REED
Thank God you're all right --

JOHNNY (O.S., RADIO)
Uh, I don't want to spoil the moment, kids --

LONG SHOT - THE HYPERCANE WHIRLS ON

-- and from this perspective, we can see how both the amphiplane and Doom's airship look like insects compared to the storm.

JOHNNY (O.S., RADIO)
-- but we've still got a teeny little problem down here.

Meanwhile --

IN THE AIRSHIP'S LOWER LABORATORY LEVEL - BEN

is stomping through, looking for Doom, who is nowhere to be seen.

BEN
(shouting)
Hey -- Doom --

Just then, a Doombot rushes at Ben -- but Ben casually **crushes** the Doombot's head and swats it aside, without breaking stride.

BEN
Come on out, ya dimestore Darth Vader --

A SOUND makes Ben look down one end of the level -- and he sees --

AT THE END OF THE LEVEL - A CONFIDENT DOOM

is flanked by a different robot. This one is about eight feet tall, of smooth, featureless chrome. Undaunted, Ben marches on --

BEN
I don't blame ya for hidin' behind robots, Doom -- but these pugs wouldn't win a bout against my Aunt Petunia.

DOOM
(unconcerned)
This model is advanced far beyond my servile Doombots, Grimm. It is an offensive weapon that mimics the molecular structure of its opponents. It is called an Adaptoid.
(casually)
It has already been exposed to the molecular structures of your companions --

Ben is still a dozen feet away -- but before he can reach the Adaptoid, it raises one featureless hand --

-- and the hand **molecularly alters** from perfectly smooth chrome into a fist. Just as Ben's jaw drops, the Adaptoid's fist **bursts into flames**, and **stretches ten feet** to deliver a powerful, flaming blow that knocks Ben back --

DOOM
-- now, you have made it fully functional.

Dazed, Ben watches as the Adaptoid's fist **mimics Ben's molecular structure** -- its chrome ripples into an orange, rocky hide that is simultaneously capable of flaming on and stretching --

-- and **the fiery, rocky fist stretches across the level** to hammer Ben with a devastating blow that knocks him clear across the level.

Meanwhile --

AT THE CONTROL LEVEL - REED

is bent over the controls, his mind racing -- until it hits him.

JOHNNY (O.S., RADIO)
Come on, buddy -- there's got to be a way --

REED (INTO RADIO)
There is, Johnny. A hurricane is a heat engine. That's how Doom created this in the first place.
(eying controls)
Doom's airship has a supply of sub-atomic thermal bombs on board. If I can fly directly over the eye and drop the bombs into it, they could generate enough heat to overload it, forcing the storm to strengthen --

INSIDE THE AMPHIPLANE - JOHNNY AND SUE

-- Johnny is incredulous, but Sue's starting to see it.

JOHNNY (INTO RADIO)
Strengthen it? Oh, that's a great idea --

SUE
(cuts in, excited)
Johnny, don't you see? If the storm picks up enough heat and enough speed, the eyewall will narrow down until it collapses in on itself --

REED (O.S., RADIO)
-- right -- the hypercane's own winds will tear itself apart at the core.

Johnny laughs with relief and grabs the radio --

JOHNNY
Excellent! Reed, you are, without a doubt, the master of disaster! I'll get this heap out of your way --

REED (O.S., RADIO)
It's -- not going to be that simple, Johnny.

Sue realizes what Reed's heading toward -- she grabs the radio --

SUE
-- Reed -- no --

REED (O.S., RADIO)
-- I've calculated that the bombs alone will provide only a fraction of the thermal energy needed. There's only one chance --
(beat)
-- if you amplify the flame into a nova blast.
(beat)
Do you understand what it means if you do?

Johnny knows exactly what this means -- the bottom just dropped out of his self-confidence. He's afraid -- this has moved a long way past fun and games. But he looks down at the storm --

-- and from this sub-orbital vantage, he can see both the tight knot of the hypercane -- and the not-so-distant East Coast. Johnny keys the radio --

JOHNNY
I understand what it means if I don't.
(beat)
I'll be ready when you are, Reed.

CUT TO:

INT. DOOM'S AIRSHIP - LOWER LABORATORY LEVEL - BEN

is getting up from the punch, woozy -- but he can see nothing -- there's no visibile sign of the Adaptoid.

There is, however, the WHOOSHING sound of something flying around him -- Ben looks around, puzzled -- until suddenly --

-- **the Adaptoid ripples out of invisibility and into view in mid-air**, flying right in front of Ben, **hurling fireballs at him** -- as Ben staggers back, the Adaptoid delivers another flaming, stretching, rocky punch, flattening Ben against an equipment wall.

Ben is getting hammered, but he's also getting mad -- he picks up a metal girder that's been knocked loose, and as the Adaptoid flies over for another pass --

-- Ben swings the bar to hit the Adaptoid broadside, knocking it off course -- as it's knocked away, it momentarily mimics the metal where it was hit, then returns to normal after a second, as if it were trying on and then rejecting that molecular structure.

Ben gets a second wind and raises the girder --

BEN
C'mere, ya carbon copycat -- I got plenty more where that came from --

But just as Ben charges the Adaptoid --

CLOSE ON BEN'S FACE - THE PRISM OF A FORCE FIELD

appears around Ben's head, forming an **airtight bubble that cuts off Ben's oxygen** -- gasping, Ben is now completely helpless.

CUT TO:

INSIDE CONTROL LEVEL - AT PANEL - REED

is bent over the panel, with ten stretched fingers independently dancing over as many different keyboards and dials under controls labelled **NAVIGATION SYSTEM** and **WEAPONS PROGRAMMING** -- when --

-- Reed's ear cocks forward -- he can hear someone approaching from behind. Time's up -- he can't be discovered at the controls. Reed finishes the final command and hits an "enter" key -- and he quickly moves away from the panel as --

AT THE OPPOSITE END OF THE LEVEL - **DOOM**

enters, glaring across at Reed --

DOOM
You shall not have the chance to sabotage me a second time, Richards --

Doom raises his gun and FIRES a burst at Reed --

-- but Reed evades the blast by elongating and swerving his body -- as Doom FIRES again, Reed's lengthened body zips into the ductwork of the ceiling, and serpentines toward Doom --

-- Doom, enraged, FIRES up into the ceiling at Reed, but Reed is able to swerve through the machinery and dodge the blasts --

-- and as one BLAST burns a hole in the ceiling ahead of him, Reed snakes his body up into it, pulling himself through it into the level above just before the nano-repair function reseals it --

DOOM

furiously moves to an exit to follow Reed -- as we GO TO --

THE LOWER LABORATORY LEVEL - BEN IS ASPHYXIATING

as he lurches across the level, choking. On the opposite side of the level, the Adaptoid is flying back in an arc of fire, clearly intending to circle back for a killing blow.

CLOSE ON BEN'S FACE

He's practically unconscious from the lack of air -- but as he looks back at the other end of the laboratory, he gets an idea -- and he turns back around --

BEN'S POV - THE ADAPTOID BLAZES DIRECTLY TOWARD HIM

building momentum -- as it flies closer --

BEN GRABS THE METAL GIRDER

and with the last of his strength, uses it to vault the Adaptoid up and back toward an opposite laboratory wall -- in that second, the Adaptoid takes on the form of the alloy in the area where it was hit, then it rejects it --

-- but its momentum forces the Adaptoid to crash into a wall that is lined from floor to ceiling with a **glass cabinet that is filled with laboratory Pyrex** -- as all of it shatters, the Adaptoid **falls to the floor, covered from head to toe in broken glass** --

-- and in the one split second that the Adaptoid **mimics the glass molecular structure** --

BEN

still cut off from his air supply, turns to **hurl the metal girder like a javelin** -- the girder connects -- and

THE "GLASS" ADAPTOID SHATTERS

into thousands of pieces that **explode** all over the level!

CLOSE ON BEN - THE FORCE FIELD

around his head evaporates. Ben breathes deeply and looks around --

THE LABORATORY LEVEL - THE FRAGMENTS OF THE ADAPTOID

are everywhere, but they are chaotically taking on different forms -- some metal, some glass, some like Ben's hide -- but it's clear they're not going to reassemble. Meanwhile --

IN THE UPPER NANOCHAMBER LEVEL - **DOOM** STEPS INTO THE LABORATORY

with his gun ready -- but as he walks in --

-- Reed springs out of the lab, his left arm whipping around Doom's laser hand to throw it to the side, as his right hand forms into a **sledgehammer** -- and for someone with no real penchant for physical violence, Reed does a great job of **slamming Doom in the face** with the "hammer" --

-- Doom has dropped the gun, but he is enraged enough to also drag the concentration down to a physical plane: Doom's hand forms into the **dense, spiked ball of a mace** and clubs Reed in a savage backhand that knocks Reed's neck back a dozen feet --

-- Reed's twisted expression shows how much this hurt -- but he **whips his head back** to **powerfully head-butt** Doom -- not just once, the way it's usually done, but with three rapid-fire volleys --

-- Doom is knocked back, dazed -- there is even a hint of blood behind the mask -- but he is by no means done. Doom transforms the armor extending from one hand into a razor-sharp scythe -- he swings at Reed, and **connects, slicing into Reed's chest** --

-- as Reed falls back, cut, weakened -- we see --

IN THE AIRSHIP CONTROL LEVEL - ON THE MONITOR PANEL

We can see out the front windows that the airship is now precisely over the hypercane's eye. A monitor tracking the airship's movement shows **TARGET LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE REACHED** -- a second reads **THERMAL BOMBS - PRIMED AND ACTIVATED** --

OUTSIDE DOOM'S AIRSHIP - A LOWER CHUTE DOOR GRINDS OPEN

-- an atomic warhead sized bomb is shoved out into freefall -- as

IN THE AMPHIBIOUS PLANE - JOHNNY AND SUE

look up -- they're just above the eye, but two miles beneath Doom's airship, and they can see the bombs falling toward them.

Johnny knows it's showtime -- he nervously opens the floor hatch, looking up to a very worried Sue at the controls. Both are sure Johnny won't be coming back alive, but neither want to admit it.

JOHNNY
Sue -- when this is over, do me a favor --
(tries for a joke)
-- make sure the Post doesn't run one of their stupid headlines, like "Storm Kayos Storm" -- or something about going out in a blaze of glory or --

SUE
(barely holding it together)
You can do it yourself.

Sue looks more worried than ever -- Johnny tries to be reassuring.

JOHNNY
Don't give me that look -- I'm coming back.
(beat)
Somebody's got to watch out for my little sister.

Johnny musters a cocky smile that's all show -- he suddenly drops out of the hatch feet first, unflamed --

-- and Sue fights tears as she pulls the plane sharply up --

WIDE VIEW OVER THE EYE OF THE HYPERCANE

The amphiplane is tracking up and away quickly, and six thermal bombs are falling in a perfect line, spaced apart by hundreds of yards. Falling alongside the first is Johnny, still unflamed --

VIEW LOOKING UP - CLOSE ON JOHNNY DIVING INTO HYPERCANE'S EYE

Johnny falls into this enormous, dark cylinder, lightning BOOMING all around him, but his face shows no more fear -- just total, complete determination to do this right, as he darts his body like a skydiver to fall ahead of the first bomb into the eye.

CUT TO:

IN THE UPPER NANO LABORATORY - **A BLOODIED DOOM**

moves over Reed, battered in the corner. Doom is also weakened, but he has maintained the scythe in his hand --

DOOM
I regret only one thing, Richards --
(expands scythe)
-- that circumstance compels me to renege on my promise to furnish you with a slow death.

But as Doom is about to finish the job -- we CUT TO:

ANGLE LOOKING UP THE EYE - NEAR THE BOTTOM - JOHNNY

is still unflamed and still plummeting ahead of the bombs, which we can see stretch up the entire length of the eyewall. Johnny is falling fast, maybe three hundred yards over the ocean --

CLOSE ON JOHNNY'S FACE

-- which is being ripped back by the velocity of the ten mile fall -- quietly, not as a game, not as a battle cry, just as a starting point, he says --

JOHNNY
-- flame on --

THE HUMAN TORCH IGNITES

and **arcs around in a full turn to head straight up** -- Johnny passes by the first bomb **just as it explodes** --

-- the first thermal bomb blooms into **a tremendous ball of fire that fills the circumference of the hypercane's eye** -- and

INSIDE THE FIREBALL - JOHNNY

is riding up and through the flames -- and at the same time that the fireball is surging and the heat's concussion is **blasting** Johnny upward, we can see that **Johnny's body is drawing in the heat** of the fireball -- he's **absorbing** it as he rises, in a process that looks like an explosion in reverse --

-- the next bomb in the chain **detonates**, and Johnny rockets up through it like a phoenix, drawing in more and more raw fire until he becomes **white hot** -- as, some miles above --

IN DOOM'S AIRSHIP - IN THE NANOLABORATORY LEVEL - **DOOM**

hears the distant but gigantic **EXPLOSIONS** -- and Doom knows something's terribly wrong -- he quickly moves away from Reed, to

THE LEVEL'S WINDOW - **GIGANTIC EXPLOSIVE FLASHES**

can be seen and heard coming from the hypercane's eye --

REED (O.S.)
I've got one regret too, Victor.
(beat)
That I have to imagine the expression on your face.

Doom turns around, furious -- to see --

DOOM'S POV - **REED IS SPRINGING AT HIM**

from across the room for a renewed attack -- as we GO BACK --

INSIDE THE EYE OF THE HYPERCANE - THE HUMAN TORCH BLASTS UP

in sequence through each fireball in the chain -- until --

AT THE TOP OF THE EYE - THE HUMAN TORCH

crests the top of a ten-mile column of flame, and he is still drawing in heat. The Torch has never looked more demonic -- at this point, he is a vaguely human shape in the midst of a dense, blinding white-hot fireball, but he is in perfect control --

-- as he reaches the top of the eyewall, Johnny's ascent halts -- he hovers atop the fire, still absorbing heat a moment longer -- until he can no longer take it --

BEHIND THE WHITE-HOT BLAZE - JOHNNY'S FACE

can barely be seen, but we can see he's in excruciating pain -- this time, he can really feel the heat --

THE HUMAN TORCH GOES INTO NOVA FLAME

-- which is just what the name implies: it looks as if a small star were exploding, surging an incredibly intense omnidirectional sphere of plasma flame out, as a blinding white light FLARES --

HIGH ABOVE IN THE AMPHIPLANE - SUE

is gaping at what's happening to her brother, but she's finally forced to shield her eyes against the blast beneath her --

OVER THE EYEWALL - THE NOVA FLAME

blasts down into the storm, entirely filling up the eye from top to bottom -- as --

THE TOP EDGE OF THE NOVA FLAME

jets upward like a solar flare toward the bottom of Doom's airship -- the powerful flames **explode through the lower hull** as if it were made of paper --

INSIDE THE AIRSHIP'S LOWER LEVEL - THE NOVA FLAME

blasts through like a blowtorch, destroying the docking level and all the aircraft inside --

IN THE LOWER LABORATORY LEVEL - **THE THING**

throws himself back from the blast -- it blazes through the floor and up to the ceiling -- and into

THE NANOLABORATORY LEVEL - DOOM AND REED

are continuing their struggle -- but the blast has rocked the airship, knocking them apart -- and --

-- the surging nova flame blasts through the floor in a powerful **explosion** that knocks Doom back --

-- as structural cracks form in the floor, Doom falls through one -- and Reed, weakened, starts to fall through another --

-- Reed catches himself before he goes through, but he's not able to pull himself up before the floor's repair function weaves shut around his body -- Reed is very painfully trapped -- as --

INSIDE THE AMPHIPLANE - SUE

is at a safe distance from the nova flame -- the heat is roasting her in the plane, but she's too busy staring down to notice --

SUE
Oh my God --

THE EYEWALL OF THE HYPERCANE IS RISING

and Johnny, still in a sphere of nova flame, is rising in synch above it, as if he were a god drawing it up after him. As predicted, the heat is making the storm stronger, but narrower -- as the eyewall is shrinking, it will soon **collapse into itself** --

ANGLE OVER DOOM'S AIRSHIP - OVER THE EYE

The nova's backblast has terminally damaged the scorched, smoking ship: its propulsion system is failing, and though it's two miles over the eye, the ship is going down as the eye is going up --

ATOP THE LENGTHENING EYEWALL - **JOHNNY**

is straining to maintain the flame -- but overcome, weak, he can't -- the nova flame **blasts one final surge of flaring, individual flames** shooting out in all directions -- and it suddenly, totally is extinguished --

-- as is Johnny, completely unconscious, **who falls toward the center of the hypercane's eye**, helpless. As he does --

INSIDE THE AMPHIPLANE - SUE

is some distance away -- but she can see Johnny limply plummeting into the hypercane --

SUE
(can't believe it)
-- no --
(won't let it happen)
-- **no** --

Sue hits the controls to dive the plane directly into the chaotic eye of the hypercane -- as --

INSIDE THE AIRSHIP - BEN CLIMBS UP THE WRECKED MIDDLE LEVEL

and we can see the whole thing is falling apart -- the nova flame punched an enormous hole straight up through every level, and what's left is riddled with fires and random explosions. Even the nano-repair function is attacking the ship -- as it's glitching, the repair function is **creating new holes** in the structure.

Ben makes it up to the top level's wreckage -- and across the way, he sees --

BEN'S POV - THE NANOCHAMBER'S CONTROL COMPUTER

is fifty feet away on a part of the ship that is weakened by fire and nano-holes -- it will fall away in seconds, taking with it the **data cartridge** -- the only thing that can make Ben human again.

But Ben's POV moves to the side -- and on the opposite side of the level, he sees that Reed is trapped within the floor -- and a fire is about to spread to a tank filled with flammable chemicals -- Reed is struggling, but he doesn't see Ben.

CLOSE ON THE THING'S FACE

He only has time to rescue one. No one sees him, and no one will ever know what his choice was -- to give up his humanity, or his friend.

Ben decides -- and **he runs as fast as he can toward Reed** --

REED
(weak, but happy to see him)
-- Ben --

BEN
(light)
What happened, stretcho? Getcher tail caught in a crack?

With that, Ben **tears the floor open** around Reed, freeing him -- and pulling Reed out of the floor, Ben **runs across the level seconds before a gas-fed explosion immolates the spot** --

-- in a relatively safe spot, Reed and Ben catch their breath --

REED
(still panting)
-- Thanks, Ben --

Unnoticed by Reed, Ben looks off to the side of the level -- the segment with the nanocomputer controls, and the all-important cartridge, falls away from the ship as Ben watches blankly.

BEN
Don't mention it.
(looks around)
Now, if you tell me how we're gettin' offa this thing, we'll call it even.

Meanwhile --

LOOKING UP THE EYEWALL - A SCORCHED, UNCONSCIOUS JOHNNY

is plunging into the lower part of the eye -- coming up behind is the amphiplane, diving down fast, but it's being buffeted by the winds -- as the eyewall shrinks, so does the available flying space, and the lightning that used to vein the walls now flashes erratically **across** the circumference of the walls --

INSIDE THE AMPHIPLANE - SUE STRUGGLES WITH THE STICK

to keep the plane under control, out of the winds and out of the lightning. Unfortunately, all of the above is the **easy** part --

-- she's now within fifty yards of Johnny -- as she gets closer --

WITHIN THE EYE - THE FORCE FIELD PRISM

forms tantalizingly near Johnny, but breaks up -- Sue tries again, and misses again: both the plane and Johnny are being tossed by the winds, making aiming impossible --

-- we can see looking down that though the ship has almost overtaken Johnny, they're both almost into the **water**: they're a thousand yards from impact --

INSIDE THE AMPHIPLANE - SUE

knows this is the last chance -- her face intensifies with concentration --

WITHIN THE EYE - THE **FORCE FIELD EXTENDS**

out from the plane, and finally, successfully **forms a sphere around Johnny** -- and Sue retracts it, drawing Johnny in --

-- even as she has to maintain the field, she has to pull the plane up sharply, ending the dive about a hundred feet over the water -- as the plane arcs up --

INSIDE THE AMPHIPLANE - SUE

struggles with the G force and the plane's limits, not to mention maintaining her concentration -- as the plane pulls up enough to give Sue a moment's respite --

-- Sue reaches down and throws open the hatch -- Johnny is below, in a force field sphere that looks like a fighter plane's belly-gun compartment. The force field retracts again to draw Johnny inside the plane --

ANGLE LOOKING UP EYEWALL - THE AMPHIPLANE

tracks straight up -- but they have miles to go through a shrinking gauntlet of **lightning** blazing across the eye -- while --

INSIDE DOOM'S AIRSHIP - BEN AND REED

try to maintain their footing -- the airship is falling apart, and the failing propulsion has put the whole thing into a spin --

-- and as Ben and Reed try to figure out what's next --

BACK IN THE SHADOWS OF THE WRECKAGE - DOOM

emerges, wavering and dazed, clutching a gun -- we can see that the explosion has destroyed some of his armor, and it too is suffering from nano-glitching that has it rippling erratically. We can also see, indistinctly, that **Doom's mask** has come off -- what we tantalizingly can't see yet is his **face**, hidden in the shadows.

DOOM
(bitterly)
So it ends as it began, Richards. Your treachery has, again, sent my dreams plunging to Earth. The difference is, this time you shall complete the journey with me.

OVER-SHOULDER SHOT BEHIND DOOM - BEN AND REED

are looking at Doom, who is approaching -- and we **still can't see Doom's face**, but Ben and Reed's surprise show they can --

DOOM
The world has been cheated of my rule -- but at least I shall not be denied this.

REED
(surprised)
Victor -- your face -- I never imagined --

With that, Doom freezes in his tracks, horrified -- he didn't realize his mask was gone. One hand gropes up to his face --

DOOM
(in horror)
My mask -- it's been destroyed --
(losing it)
My **face** --

Doom throws back his head -- we still can't see his face, but he is standing directly underneath the thousands of mirrors that line the nano-chamber -- and --

DOOM'S POV - THOUSANDS OF REFLECTIONS OF HIS FACE SCREAM

back at him, and it is a nightmare worthy of Doom's soul-torn SHRIEK -- a monstrous, **misshapen tapestry of burns and scar tissue --**

DOOM
MY FAAAAACE --

UNDERNEATH THE NANOCHAMBER'S MIRRORS - DOOM

has dropped the gun to totally cover his face with his hands -- as he sinks to his knees, immobilized in total madness --

-- an **EXPLOSION** from underneath collapses the floor under him -- and Doom falls into the lower levels of the ship --

-- the blast of flame from underneath burns through the tattered strands of the floor under Ben -- and it gives way under Ben's weight, dropping him one level down --

BEN FALLS

with a CRASH onto a segment of floor that precariously holds him above a surging inferno underneath him -- in a moment, he's going to plummet into it -- but --

-- Reed's hand stretches into view --

REED (O.S.)
(shouts down)
Take my hand!

Ben grabs it -- and as he does, Reed's foot stretches down --

REED (O.S.)
Now take my foot --

Now Ben's confused, but he grabs it -- and as he does, Reed's upside-down head stretches into view, nose-to-nose with Ben, with an expression of life-or-death urgency on his face --

REED
Now grab my neck --

BEN
(explodes)
If this is your way of askin' for a kiss goodbye, you can forget it --

REED
(overlapping)
Just do it, you big lumm--

Reed is choked off in mid-sentence as Ben grabs his neck --

VIEW DOWN FROM TOP LEVEL OF AIRSHIP - REED'S TORSO BILLOWS OPEN

into a full-blown parachute that carries them upward, with Ben hanging on by Reed's arm, legs and neck -- they're blown up by the air rushing through the holes, as the ship falls around them --

-- the rushing wind, and thermal drafts from the fire, hurl Reed up with enough force that his body knocks an exit hole in the tattered remains of the roof, dragging Ben behind --

LONG SHOT VIEW OF AIRSHIP - AS IT PLUMMETS TOWARD THE EYE

-- Reed and Ben burst free out of the ship's top level --

ANGLE ON BEN DANGLING FROM REED/PARACHUTE

-- Reed's head stretches out from Ben's fist, looking down to see that the amphiplane is rocketing straight up toward them --

-- so Reed stretches out his free arm -- it arcs around on itself to form a forty-foot **loop** --

INSIDE THE AMPHIPLANE - FRONT VIEW OUT WINDSHIELD

Johnny and Sue can see the loop, above them and closing fast --

THE AMPHIPLANE FLIES INTO THE LOOP OF REED'S ARM

-- and as it does, Reed closes the loop around the tail of the plane, so that Reed and Ben are pulled along behind them --

-- we see from Reed's face that the velocity is a shock, but it's manageable -- as his body is stretched out into a long strand instead of a parachute, he starts to draw his body in, along with Ben underneath, to catch up with the plane --

IN THE AMPHIPLANE - SUE

looks out at the glass -- Reed has stretched his neck even with the windshield, and he mouths the words "open the hatch" -- as --

DOOM'S AIRSHIP FALLS INTO THE EYE OF THE HYPERCANE

which has narrowed to almost nothing. As the remains of the airship swirl into the ferocious winds of the eyewall -- we SEE --

INSIDE THE AIRSHIP - CLOSE ON DOOM'S EYE

-- so close, we're in his pupil -- but we PULL BACK until we can see **Doom's true face**, as he stands, calmly waiting for the end in a relatively tranquil section of the ship --

-- and **his handsome face is virtually unmarked**. There is nothing but a slender, one inch scar beneath one eye. One second later --

THE AIRSHIP EXPLODES WITHIN THE NARROW EYE OF THE HYPERCANE

-- the **BLAST is swallowed within the collapse** of the eye -- as --

THE AMPHIPLANE STREAKS AWAY - THE FANTASTIC FOUR

look down at the blast, and the collapsing core of the storm -- nothing is left but scattered rainclouds. Reed is still gathering up his arm, trying to rub some of the soreness out of it, as Ben looks down at the former hypercane.

BEN
Not too shabby, rubberneck --
(beat)
-- the question is, what're we gonna do to top this?

Reed doesn't answer Ben -- he looks over to Sue with a broad, exhausted grin -- and we --

CUT TO:

EXT. **FOUR FREEDOMS PLAZA - ATOP THE ROOF - A WEDDING**

is taking place here, amongst decorations and trellises set up for the occasion -- as about thirty watch from their seats --

AT A FRONT TRELLIS - ON A PLATFORM

-- the ceremony between Reed and Sue, in non-heroic but stunning wedding attire, draws to a close. Johnny is standing up for Sue, and Ben, the best man in an oversized but perfectly fitting morning suit, is struggling to fight back tears.

MINISTER
-- I now pronounce you man and wife.

The onlookers APPLAUD and CHEER -- and under the noise --

REED AND SUE

turn toward each other, quietly. Sue looks around at the surroundings, the building, and everything they've become --

SUE
(wryly)
So -- is this everything you dreamed of?

REED
No -- not quite yet --

A **force field** breaks over Sue's face to pull back her bridal veil.

REED
Now it is.

Reed leans in for a very long kiss -- and --

A MOMENT LATER - BACK IN THE CROWD

-- Ben rejoins Alicia -- and Johnny hooks up with Frankie. From the platform, Sue throws her bouquet --

-- and the bouquet is clearly, irrevocably on its way back toward Frankie and Johnny, neither of whom want it. Johnny quickly but surreptitiously raises his hand --

-- and he doesn't flame on, he fires a wave of thermal energy toward the bouquet. You can see the heat ripple in the air as it knocks the bouquet off course --

-- and directly into the hands of Alicia. Ben and Johnny share a look -- and a smile. And --

A MOMENT LATER - **JOHNNY FLIES OVER THE ROOF**

in his fire-retardant tux, ZINGING fireballs at a couple of television helicopters that have gotten too close. After a few near-misses, the copters clear out -- and --

THE FANTASTICAR BLASTS OUT OF THE "4" LAUNCHER

with Reed and Sue inside, heading toward a honeymoon instead of a holocaust for a change -- and as Johnny flies back down to the rooftop reception -- we --

FADE TO BLACK.